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**PREMIER ISSUE**

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1994 NO.1

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# C fine COOKING

PREMIER ISSUE  
FEBRUARY/MARCH 1994 ISSUE 1



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Cover photo, Jon Brown; inset, Robert Marsala.  
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We invite you to share your thoughts, opinions, and comments with fellow readers. Please send your cards or letters to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

## TO OUR READERS

Welcome to Taunton's new cooking magazine, *Fine Cooking*. For many years, The Taunton Press has meant high-quality information for woodworkers, home builders, sewers, and gardeners. Now for all of us cooking enthusiasts, Taunton also means great cooking!

But as you can see from this first issue, *Fine Cooking* is not just another food magazine. It's about the *hows*, and more importantly, the *whys* of cooking. It's written by cooks, for cooks like you. The photos are not just pretty pictures taken on a set, using props to accent finished dishes. These are photos of real cooks in real kitchens.

The breadth of articles you see here is not a one-time thing for a premier issue. You'll find it in every issue, and hopefully, the articles will be even better, as our capable staff hits its stride.

*Fine Cooking* is your magazine. We encourage you to write. It could be a suggestion for an article, a note on what we do well or not so well, a problem to solve, or a cooking tip to share.

Most importantly, it's *your* knowledge of cooking we want to share with your fellow readers. Our goal is to provide the best information and most useful ideas to enhance everyone's cooking. It's an exciting time for us and I hope we'll hear from you.

—Jan Wahlin, Publisher

## LEARNING FROM FELLOW COOKS

Congratulations on the kickoff of *Fine Cooking* magazine. I occasionally thumb through issues of my husband's *Fine Woodworking* magazine, also published by Taunton, and I'm always impressed by the exchange of information through articles written *not* by professional writers, but by enthusiastic readers who have something important to share with fellow craftsmen.

By the same token, I hope you will seek out and feature some of America's real cooks, those people across the country, both professional and enthusiast

alike, who are passionate about food and have discovered new techniques, tools, and recipes to share with readers like me. As a food professional, there's only so much I can learn in the classroom. It's learning from others and working "hands-on" that help me develop my skills, so that I'm not just cooking from a recipe, I'm cooking from experience!

I look forward to meeting many of these cooks through the pages of your magazine and learning from their experience. I believe this exchange of ideas and information is a unique service you offer your readers, and one that will make *Fine Cooking* a valuable resource for me for years to come.

—Judy Rusignuolo, Warwick, NY

## HEALTHY DISHES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Recently, I have read that a healthy diet contains greater amounts of grains, fruits, and vegetables, and less meat and fat than Americans currently eat. I have also read that people in other areas of the world eat a healthier diet than most Americans.

As a *Fine Cooking* subscriber who is interested in both health and the cuisines of other countries, I would like to see recipes that both authentically represent ethnic cuisines and that emphasize vegetables and grains. Yet, I don't want my cooking to taste like "health food," nor do I wish to spend all day in the kitchen. Is it possible to publish enticing recipes from, say, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, or Japan, that are reasonably healthy and not prohibitively time-consuming to execute?

I realize it's a tall order, but I'm always looking for that unusual and delicious dish which is also healthy and quick.

—Katharine Kates, San Francisco, CA

## CHEMISTRY OF COOKING

I would like to learn more about the chemistry of cooking. For example, when baking a cake, what happens if you change the ratio of eggs to flour, or if you increase the butter? How can I know before baking if a brownie will be cake-like or fudgy and chewy? I have never found a magazine or cookbook that educates the cook about why things happen.

—Cynthia Hariu, Lynbrook, NY

# C<sup>fine</sup> COOKING

Publisher/Editor Jan Wahlin

Art Director Steve Hunter

Associate Editor Martha Holmberg

Assistant Editor Suzanne Roman

Editorial Assistant Susan Lantzis

Copy/Production Editor Li Agen

Contributing Editor Ruth Lively

Design Director Susan Edelman

Editorial Director John Lively

Circulation Coordinator Sarah Roman

Public Relations Manager Donna Pierpont

Administrative Secretary Nancy Crider

Advertising Manager Tom Leihbacher  
800/283-7252 ext. 547

Advertising Sales Coordinators  
Margaret Capellaro, Nancy Clark

Marketing Secretary Christine Ferguson

## How to contact The Taunton Press:

Telephone: 800/283-7252  
203/426-8171

Fax: 203/426-3434

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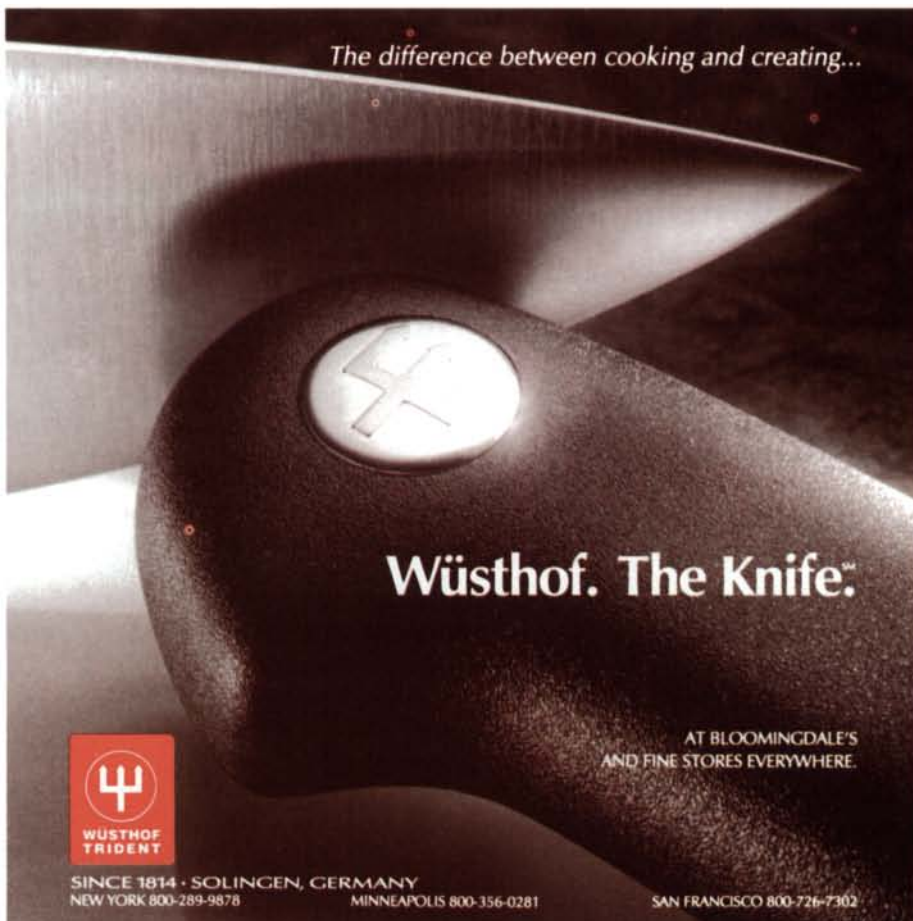
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## Writing an article

*Fine Cooking* welcomes articles, proposals, manuscripts, photographs, and ideas from our readers, amateur or professional. We'll acknowledge all submissions, return those we can't use, and pay for articles we publish. Send your contributions to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.




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### FIDDLEHEAD FERNS

*What exactly are fiddlehead ferns, and how should I prepare, cook, and serve them?*

—Richard Vignolo, San Francisco, CA

**Jasper White replies:** Fiddlehead ferns are tender young ferns (bracken is the most common variety) that have yet to uncurl. They're one of the first spring vegetables to appear each year, and until recently they were only foraged for, not cultivated. Their flavor resembles that of asparagus.

To prepare fiddleheads, you must remove the protective layer of light brown fuzz and give them a preliminary cooking to tenderize them. I've found that repeated soaking, followed by blanching twice in boiling salted water, is the best way to perform these two chores.

Put the fiddleheads in a large pot or bowl of cold water and stir until the brown coating begins to come off. Change the water and repeat the process a few times until most of the fuzz is gone.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the fiddleheads and blanch for about a minute. A lot of the brown fuzz will rise to the top of the pot. Skim it off, drain the fiddleheads, and rinse under cold water. Rinse out the pot, fill it again with salted water, and return to a boil. Blanch the fiddleheads until tender (three to four minutes); drain and rinse

under cold water. Check each piece, removing by hand what did not come off in the water. The fiddleheads are now ready to use.

To serve fiddleheads, I recommend seasoning them with salt and pepper and sautéing them in olive oil over medium-high heat until golden brown, five to six minutes. They're also excellent when sautéed with diced onions or shallots or sliced leeks.

Another delicious combination would be to sauté the fiddleheads with ramps (wild leeks) and morels (which fern-pickers often come across while foraging). Fiddleheads are also an excellent addition to vegetable soups and stews. Add them in the last few minutes of cooking.

*Jasper White is the chef/owner of Jasper's Restaurant in Boston, Massachusetts, and author of Jasper White's Cooking from New England (Harper Collins, 1989).*

### AGED BEEF

*Why is beef aged, and how can I tell if the beef I'm buying is aged?*

—Anne Strauss, New York, NY

**Jack Ubaldi replies:** Aged beef (or hung beef) refers to top-quality beef that has undergone a process to enhance its flavor and increase its tenderness in a natural way. Beef is the meat that we usually associate with aging, but lamb is also aged. Poultry, veal, and pork are not aged because they're high in unsaturated fat, which quickly becomes rancid. The fat in beef is mostly saturated and doesn't spoil as quickly.

The best method for aging meat is known as dry aging, which is done by

keeping large pieces of meat on the bone (such as whole prime rib, a whole shell with the bone in, or a short loin) in constant dry refrigeration at 34° to 36° F. Beef is dry-aged for two to three weeks, and lamb for one week. Only top-quality whole pieces of meat that are well covered with fat may be aged. Because the surface of aged meat must be discarded, it would be too wasteful to use smaller cuts, such as steaks.

Aged meat is tender because natural enzymes in the meat break down the meat fibers over time. The enhanced flavor of aged meat is due to two factors. One is that the proteins in the meat break down into amino acids, which have a strong flavor. The other is that meat loses one percent of its water weight per day, making the flavor of the meat more intense.

To tell if beef has been aged, look at the color. Fresh beef is a bright cherry-red color, and the fat is a creamy white. When aged, the surface of the meat becomes dark and dry and shows wisps of mold. When sliced, as it would be when on display in a butcher shop, the meat is deep red. You'll also see a gray line in the fat bordering the meat. The surface fat will have lost its look of freshness and will be dried out. These are signs of properly aged beef. Because aged beef is quite expensive, you'll seldom find it in supermarkets. Look for it in specialty butcher shops.

*Jack Ubaldi has been the owner and butcher of the Florence Prime Meat Market in New York City for forty years. He's also an instructor at the New School's New York Restaurant School.*

(Continued)

## Taunton

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for fellow enthusiasts

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**WHAT TO DRINK WITH CAKE**

*I have always served champagne with cake for special celebrations. Recently, I heard that champagne does not complement cake or desserts. Why is this, and what would you suggest in its place?*

—Annette Michler, Vancouver, Canada

**Shirley Sarvis replies:** The most important factor to honor in matching a dessert pleasingly with any wine, whether a sparkling wine such as champagne or still wine, is to keep the sweetness levels of both as nearly equal as possible. Otherwise, the dessert or the wine with the highest sweetness will detract from the other. Most cakes are sweeter than most sparkling wines, especially champagnes. So, after a taste of the sweet cake, the sip of champagne tastes plain or even tart.

Some champagnes are lightly but notably sweet to be pleasing with desserts. They are labeled (in order of increasing sweetness): Extra Dry, which has a slight sweetness, Sec or Dry, Demi-Sec, and Doux. However, even the sweetest of these, Doux, with about five percent sugar, is not very sweet. With other sparkling wines, the label designations are Extra Dry and Brut, the latter being the sweeter.

Many still dessert wines are sweeter than “dessert” champagnes. Therefore, it’s easier to find a sweetness level to match a sweet cake among still dessert wines than among dessert champagnes or other sparkling wines.

If you do want to serve champagne with cake, choose a cake of relatively little sweetness, richness, and power of flavor, and one with a texture that’s delicate and uncomplicated.

*Shirley Sarvis is a food and wine writer and consultant in San Francisco.*

**BUYING TUNA STEAKS**

*Why are some fresh tuna steaks light in color and others are much darker, and how can I tell if they are fresh by looking at them?*

—Ellen Wax, Portland, OR

**Steve Cook replies:** There are two main reasons for the color difference in tuna steaks. One is the species. Tuna steaks are almost always cut from yellowfin,

bigeye, or bluefin tuna, which are generally considered the choicest species. Yellowfin is the lightest in color, a rosy red. The bigeye has a deeper red color, while the bluefin is a very deep red to purple. The pale albacore tuna is generally not cut into steaks but is reserved for canning.

The second reason for color difference in tuna steaks is the fat content. A tuna steak with a higher fat content will have a lighter color than a leaner one of the same species. The fat content of the steak varies depending on which part of the fish the steak came from. The tuna belly is fattier than the back, so a steak from the belly would be lighter in color than one cut from the back.

The fat content also varies depending on the time of year. In the fall, tuna caught off the northern Atlantic coast of the United States are higher in fat because they have been up in the northern waters all summer putting on weight to prepare for their migration south. However, after their migration in early winter to warmer waters, they are leaner.

The lighter-colored, fattier tuna steaks have more flavor than the lean, although this flavor difference is more easily detected when the tuna is eaten raw (it has a sweeter taste); it’s less noticeable when eaten cooked.

When buying tuna steaks, the shininess of the fish is more important than the variations in color. A shiny, bright-colored steak is a sign of freshness. A steak with a dull shine, whatever the color, is a sign that it has passed optimum freshness.

*Steve Cook is a co-owner of the Rowayton Seafood Market in Rowayton, Connecticut.*

**COARSE-TEXTURED GÉNOISE**

*I made a génoise cake the other day. Instead of having a light, even texture, it had a heavy, coarse texture, much like that of cornbread. I don’t believe that I overwhipped the eggs and sugar, or overmixed the batter. What could have been the problem?*

—Jeanette Linsey, Westport, CT

**Nick Malgieri replies:** Génoise, the type of cake you made, is an egg-foam cake. It gets its leavening from the air that’s in-

corporated into the batter as the eggs and sugar are whipped together. Génoise is a delicate cake and therefore requires special attention.

The heavy texture that you describe occurs when the batter has fallen during baking, causing the cake to have an uneven, almost bread-like texture. Many factors may contribute to this, in fact, you already named the two main reasons—overwhipping and overmixing.

It may not always be apparent that the egg foam has been overwhipped. To test the egg foam for sufficient whipping, lift the whisk or the beaters and allow the mixture to flow back into the bowl. The whipped eggs and sugar should hold their shape (or “form a ribbon”) for a few seconds before dissolving. When the egg foam is overwhipped, it looks stiffer and requires more vigorous mixing to incorporate the flour. This excessive mixing can make the batter collapse and lose volume.

There are several other factors that contribute to a cake of this type falling while baking. One is lumps of flour or other material (such as grated citrus zest) in the batter. These act like weights, pulling downward on the batter as it tries to rise. The cause: imperfect sifting of the dry ingredients or adding too much at once to the batter so that the egg foam cannot absorb it easily.

Another factor is the flour you use. The wrong flour, especially unbleached, all-purpose flour, can make the cake heavy. To ensure a good génoise, look for a recipe that calls for cake flour, or even a combination of cake flour and cornstarch for extra lightness.

Adding a chemical leavening such as baking powder to génoise may cause the cake to rise like a soufflé, then fall and flatten.

Oven temperature is also critical. A cold oven will let the génoise lose air before it begins to set. This is the equivalent of leaving the batter in the pan for a long time after mixing and before baking. Always bake egg-foam cakes immediately in a preheated oven.

*Nick Malgieri is the director of the baking program at Peter Kump’s New York Cooking School and author of Perfect Pastry (Macmillan, 1989) and Great Italian Desserts (Little, Brown, 1990). ♦*



# Professional CHEF

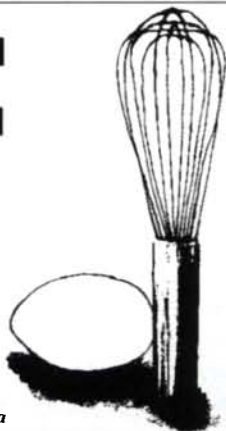
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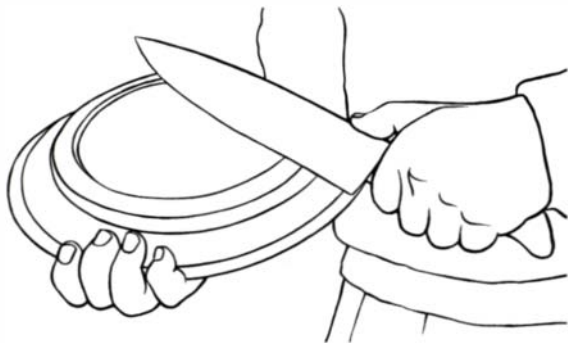
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## Sharpening Knives



Your cupboard is probably full of some of the best knife sharpeners around. I'm talking about the unglazed rims on the bottoms of many bowls, plates, saucers, and mugs. When ceramic ware is removed from the kiln and cooled, its bottom is typically ground flat. This removes the glaze along the rim and exposes a very hard, abrasive surface that's perfect for putting fresh edges on knives and cleavers.

To sharpen a knife on the bottom of a plate, flip the plate over and hold it in one hand along your forearm. Holding the knife in your other hand (at an angle of about 25° to the plate), slide the knife forward, heel to toe, along the rim, as though you were trying to take a thin slice off the plate. Turn the knife over every few strokes to hone the opposing edge. The rim of the plate will begin to darken as it cuts away steel from the blade. When it gets really dark, which means the ceramic is clogged with filings, move to an unused part of the rim.

Running the plate through the dishwasher will remove most of the metal and keep stains off your good linens. But a brown stain—residual rust deposits—will remain on the rim.

—Albert Pound, New Haven, CT

## Preparing Pasta Ahead

In my job as chef to the Governor of Ohio, I often serve pasta for dinner parties. I've always found it difficult to cook and sauce the pasta just before service,

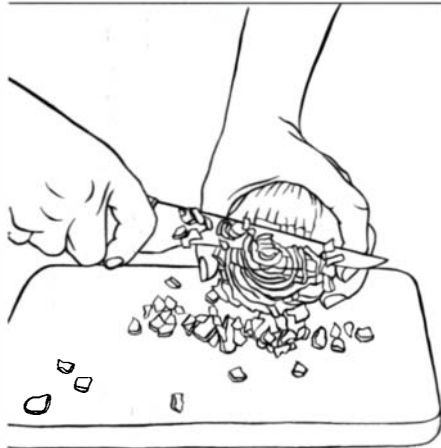
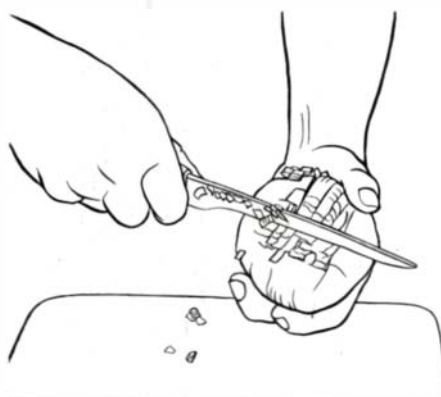
so I found a method for cooking the pasta ahead of time and holding it until I'm ready to serve it.

This method works for any type of pasta, but dried pasta seems to hold up a little better than fresh. Cook the pasta—whatever the shape—in the usual manner until done. Drain it well, then toss it with oil, salt, and freshly ground black pepper. You should use just a little bit of oil and toss the pasta thoroughly so that each strand is completely coated. Put the pasta in a large, ovenproof bowl and cover with foil. Put the bowl in a very low oven—250°F. The pasta will stay hot for up to an hour and won't stick together. When you're ready for the pasta course, just add the sauce and serve.

—Frannie Packard, Governor's Residence, Columbus, OH

## Chopping Onion Quickly

When I lived in Mexico, I picked up a tip for chopping a small amount of onion. Peel the onion and grasp it firmly in one hand, stem end up and fingers held out of the way. Strike the onion with a sharp knife, making parallel cuts about half an inch deep across the top. Turn the onion

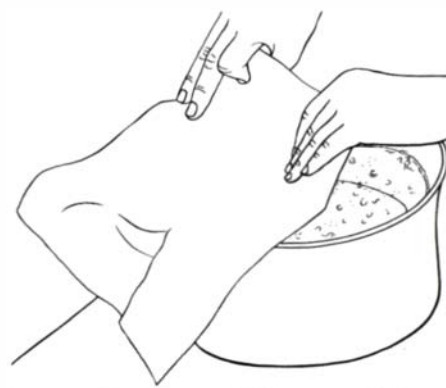


90° and strike it some more, making a crosshatch pattern of cuts. Finally, set the onion on a cutting board and slice through the scored part of the onion. Wrap the remaining onion in plastic and refrigerate until next time.

It takes a little getting used to, but once you're confident, it's very quick and efficient. When just starting out, work carefully, keeping your fingertips curled well away from the knife. Make sure to use a knife with a blade long enough to span the whole surface of the onion.

—Peggy Cain, Glenwood Springs, CO

## Fat-Free Stock



It's easy to remove a large amount of fat from a sauce or stock by simply spooning it off, but it's not so easy to get that last film of fat without spooning away half of your precious stock. One method that works to remove the fat but leaves the stock is to use a sheet of paper towel to absorb the fat. The stock should be in a wide pan or bowl, and it should be warm, so the fat is free-flowing. Lay a sheet of paper towel over the surface of the stock. (If you have a two-ply sheet, separate it

(Continued)



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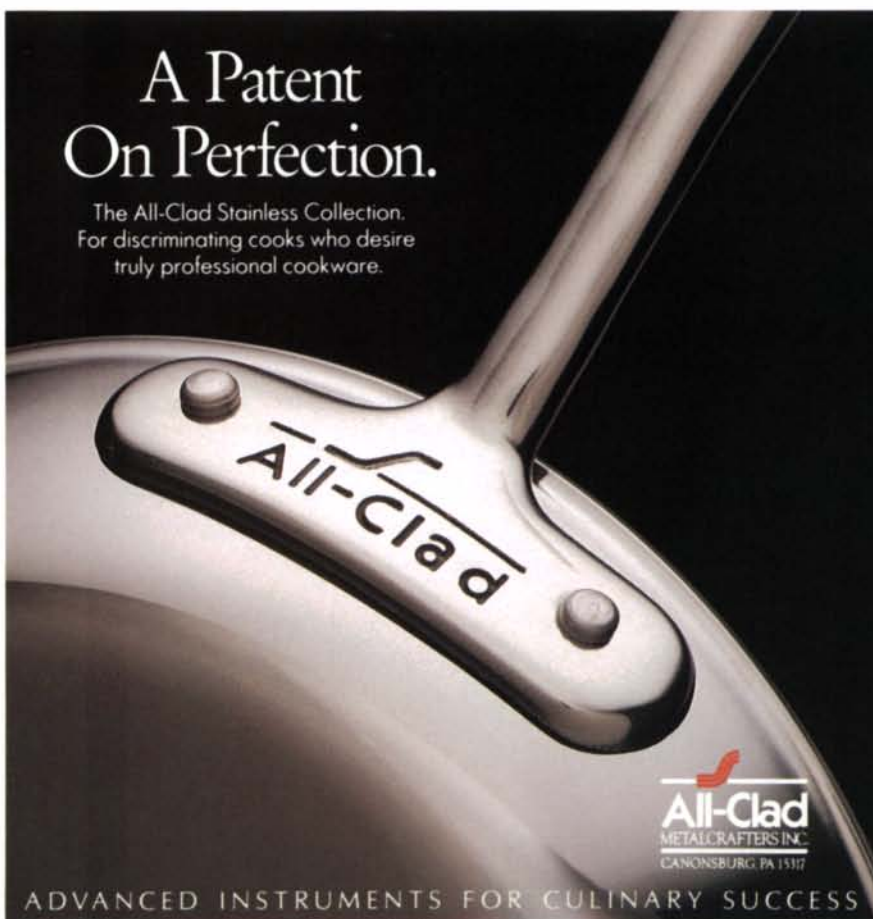
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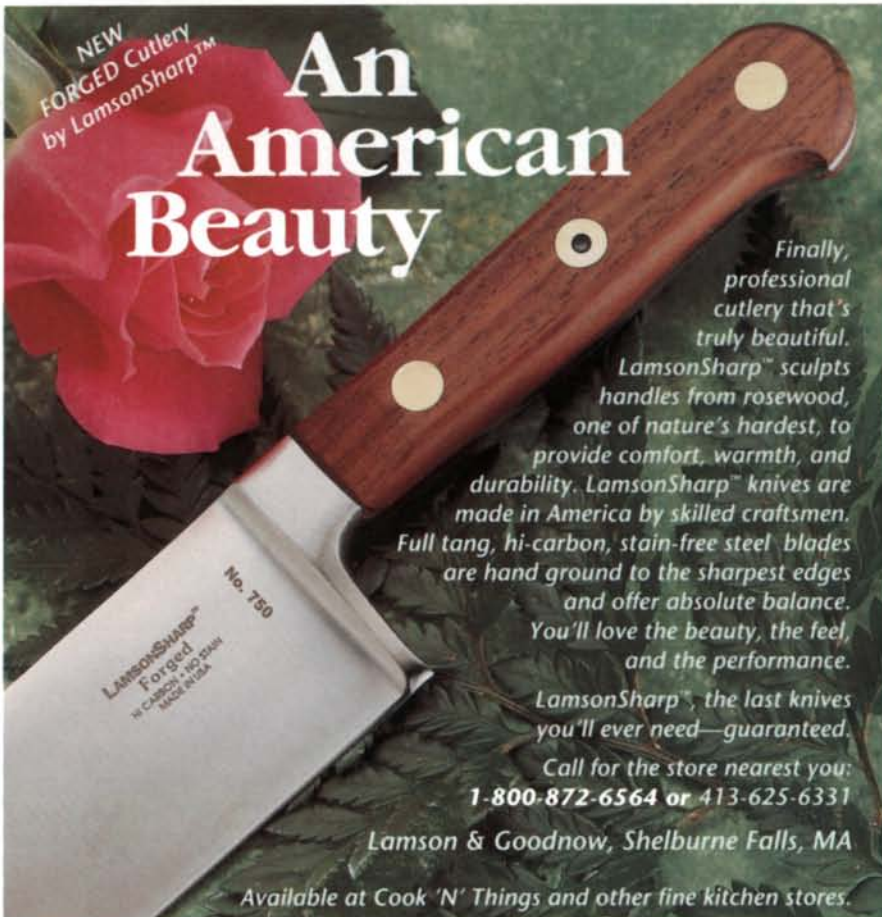
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and use only one layer.) Immediately draw it up toward you and away from the stock. Have the trash can handy for the dripping towels. Repeat with new sheets until no more fat is visible on the surface of the stock.

—Blair Sanders, Dallas, TX

## Zester as Grater



When I want to grate just a little Parmesan cheese, I use my lemon zester instead of my cheese grater. With the zester, I can shave off a small amount quickly enough, and I'm not left with the chore of washing the grid panel of the grater.

—Steve Hunter, Brookfield, CT

## Retrieving Bouquet Garni

When I use a *bouquet garni* (a bundle of fresh parsley, thyme, bay leaf, and celery that I wrap in leek leaves) in a soup or stew, it gets soft and mushy during cooking, and it's often difficult to fish out. I tie it with an extra length of kitchen twine and attach the other end to the pot handle. When I'm ready to remove the bundle, I just pull it out by the twine.

—Joan Dall'Acqua, Arlington, VA

## Baking Pastries Perfectly

I learned a valuable baking technique from Chef Albert Jorant, one of my teachers at La Varenne cooking school in Paris. When baking cookies, choux puffs, or pastry cases directly on a baking sheet, slide a thin palette knife or metal spatula under the pastries to loosen them from the sheet about halfway through the cooking time. If you don't do this, some parts of the pastry can become

stuck to the sheet and will receive more heat directly from the metal sheet. By "freeing" the underside of the pastries, the whole bottom surface of the pastry receives the same amount of heat and therefore will brown evenly, with no dark rings or edges. Chef Jorant performed this step without thinking (and without telling us students), and it was only after months of watching him work that I realized how important a maneuver it is. I've adopted this technique, and over the years it has saved many batches of pastries, I'm sure.

—Anne Sterling, Lincroft, NJ

## Natural Copper Cleaner



Photo: Robert Marzala

For a quick and natural way to clean copperware, just mix a solution of about two parts salt to one part vinegar or lemon juice, rub it lightly onto the copper, and then rinse. Be sure to wear rubber gloves if you have any cuts or nicks on your hands, because the combination of acid and salt is *not* soothing!

—Inger Skaarup, Kansas City, MO

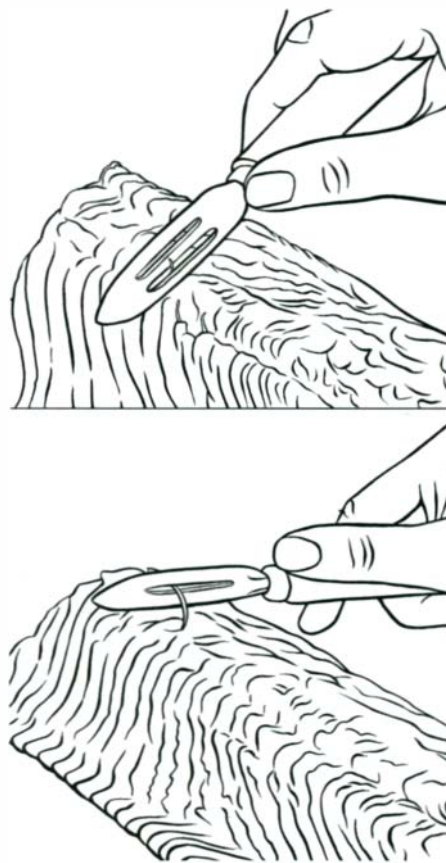
## Folding with a Whisk

When combining beaten egg whites with other ingredients, use a whisk instead of a rubber spatula to fold in the delicate whites. The goal is to avoid deflating the whites by working quickly and efficiently, so that you have the maximum volume in your soufflé, cake batter, mousse, or whatever. When you fold with a whisk, each wire of the whisk draws the egg whites into the rest of the mixture, so

only a few deft strokes are necessary to thoroughly blend the two components. With the conventional spatula method, you need to use more strokes, and you're working with a heavier utensil, so you risk overworking the whites and losing precious volume. Use the same "cutting-and-rolling" motion that you would with a spatula, and be sure to turn the bowl as you fold.

—Karen Metz, Peter Kump's School of Culinary Arts, Washington, DC

## Removing Fish Bones



To remove the pin bones from along the center of a salmon fillet, a pair of needle-nose pliers works best, but in a pinch, you can use a rigid-blade vegetable peeler. First run your finger along the center of the fillet to find the row of bones and to make each bone stand up and away from the flesh. Slide the vegetable peeler over the bone so that the bone threads itself through one slot of the blade. Rotate the blade away from you just a little to catch the bone, then pull sharply to remove it.

—Randall Price, Middletown, OH ♦



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# Wheat gluten— the muscle in baked goods



The typical consumer probably sees wheat flour as a whitish, dusty powder, largely inert and not particularly interesting. In fact, it's a remarkably complex substance. Its composition and properties vary depending upon the type of wheat from which it was milled and upon the conditions under which that wheat was grown. For the serious home baker, it's important to have a basic knowledge of wheat and flour types, and to understand why particular flours perform best for particular baked goods, whether you're making bread, a pie crust, or a layer cake.

Aside from taste and nutrition, baked goods differ from one another in terms of structure. A light, airy whole-wheat bread and a chewy, toothy pasta owe their unique textures largely to gluten. Gluten is the stuff in bread dough that holds everything together and imparts texture. By the same token, a crisp, flaky pie crust and a tender cake owe *their* textures, in part, to a *lack* of gluten. The baker can control the amount of gluten by selecting different types of flour and different methods of preparing dough.

Many thousands of wheat varieties have been catalogued. Major classes include hard red winter, hard red spring, soft red winter, white (both hard and soft), and durum wheats. Within each class there are hundreds of varieties, each with its own personality, physical and chemical characteristics, and baking performance. (These differences can be likened to the distinctions among grape varieties and their functions in producing various wines.) A good flour miller has the knowledge and experience to draw upon appropriate wheat classes and varieties to mill flours suited to different purposes.

**Protein and gluten**—Largely due to their higher protein contents (11 to 13

percent), hard-wheat flours are preferred for breads. Soft wheat flours, low in protein (8 to 9 percent), are better for cakes, cookies, pastries, and similar baked goods. All-purpose flours are typically made from a combination of hard and soft wheats. With a protein content of 9 to 11 percent, all-purpose flour can be used successfully to make many bakery products, although you usually can make much better products with flours milled for specific purposes. Durum, the hardest of wheats, has a protein content of 12 to 15 percent. When milled, it produces a coarse, yellowish flour called semolina, which is used to make dried pastas. Semolina produces a

## SCIENCE PROJECT

Here's an experiment that allows you to observe gluten's properties up close. Mix  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup bread flour and about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons cool water to make a stiff dough. Knead the dough for several minutes to develop the gluten, and then immerse the dough in cool water. After about an hour, softly massage the dough in the bowl of water to wash the white starch away, changing the water several times until most of the starch is gone. The tan, rubbery stuff you're left with is gluten. Pull and stretch the lump between your fingers to demonstrate gluten's *viscoelasticity* (its ability to be stretched and then to spring back).

very strong dough, which holds up well to being stretched and cut, and is less liable to break when dried.

All of this talk about protein percentages is important because a flour's ability to produce gluten is directly related to its protein content. Strictly speaking, only the building blocks for gluten exist in flour. Gluten itself is formed only when the proteins, along with a small quantity of other components, link together to form long strands or molecular chains called polymers. This linking happens when the flour is hydrated and then worked by mixing or kneading.

Gluten is a rubbery material that is *viscoelastic* (that is, it is both stretchable and elastic). These properties come from gluten's two major components, glutenin

and gliadin. Glutenin imparts elasticity, while gliadin contributes extensibility. The balance of these two properties accounts for the truly unique properties of gluten, shared by no other cereal protein.

**How gluten works**—Gluten is critical to the structure of doughs. In a wheat-flour dough, the gluten provides a continuous network that envelopes all the starch granules, which are the major flour components. This three-dimensional network forms a lattice work for the dough. In a yeast dough, carbon-dioxide gas is generated as the yeast ferments. The expanding gases, trapped in thousands of small pockets, cause the gluten to stretch considerably (by four- or fivefold). During baking, the expanded, porous dough structure is rendered stable because the heat causes the gluten to denature irreversibly into a gel-like or a rigid structure, depending on the final moisture content of the product. Similar things happen when you cook an egg or perm your hair.

Proper mixing or kneading is critical to the success of breadmaking. Sufficient energy must be imparted into a dough to adequately develop the gluten into its most favorable structure. The more protein in the flour, the more mixing it will require. Not only do high-protein flours develop more gluten, but their gluten is also stronger than that produced by low-protein flours. (High- and low-protein flours are typically referred to as "strong" or "weak," respectively, a reflection of how much muscle it takes to develop the gluten.) Some bread flours used by commercial bakers really require mixing by heavy-duty machines. Such flours make dough that's difficult to knead by hand to the point where the gluten is optimally developed, and so are to be avoided by home bakers without mixing equipment.

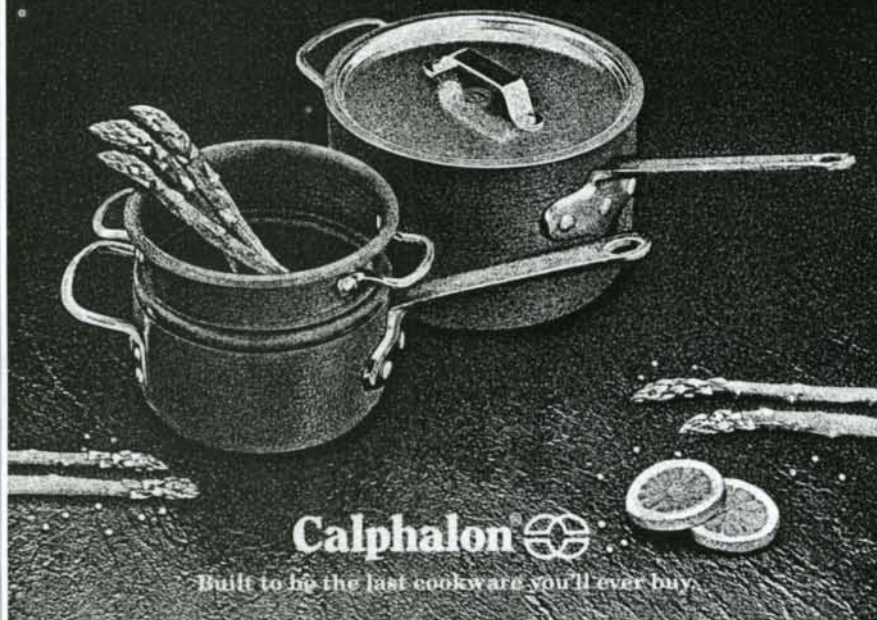
It is possible to overmix dough. In any flour, there's an optimum point of mixing, which coincides with optimum gluten development. If worked past that point, the gluten polymers begin to break down. An overworked dough becomes sticky and results in a loaf of bread with less volume and a denser, coarser crumb than is desir-



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able. If you're kneading bread by hand, it's difficult to overwork it; if you're using a machine, there's a greater danger of doing so, especially with a dough made with all-purpose flour.

How can you determine when a dough is adequately kneaded? Short of employing special instruments used by baking technologists, the experienced baker relies on certain signals, such as the onset of a characteristic satin sheen on the dough surface, or the balanced extensible-elastic feel when a piece of dough is stretched between the fingers.

**Gluten in other baked goods—**Gluten is also important for some pastry items. Dough for danish pastry, which is rolled, typically contains some bread flour. Rolled cookie doughs and even puff pastry require some gluten for stability and strength; but the amount of gluten formed by soft or all-purpose flours is always adequate.

If gluten were allowed to develop in cake batter to the same extent it is in breads, you'd have to eat cake with a

knife and fork. In cakes, gluten formation is minimized because the batters are alkaline (made so by the addition of baking soda), and therefore they slightly dissolve the flour's proteins. Bread doughs, in contrast, are slightly acidic. In the United States and some other countries, high-quality cake flours (which are low in protein and therefore low in potential gluten to begin with) are usually subjected to very small quantities of gaseous chlorine. The purpose of chlorinating cake flour is to modify the starch so that it sets up more rapidly in baking, but the chlorine also impairs the flour's gluten-forming ability.

**Vital gluten—**Gluten also is available as an ingredient, called *vital gluten*. Vital gluten is produced by wet-extracting gluten from flour, then carefully drying and pulverizing the gluten to retain most of its original vitality. Added at the rate of about one tablespoon per loaf, vital gluten can help strengthen doughs made from weaker flours, as well as those containing appreciable quantities of inert

ingredients such as raisins, nuts, or non-gluten-forming cereals like oats, rice, and soy flour. Vital gluten is quite absorbent, rapidly taking up about twice its weight in water, so extra water must be added to the dough. Gluten is also used in other foods: it's blended with meats as a binder or an extension, it's added to breadings or coating batters, and it's used to strengthen pasta doughs made from relatively weak flours. In Japanese cuisine, cooked gluten, called *seitan*, is added to dishes in much the same way as firm tofu is used.

One ingredient that complements and strengthens gluten is salt. In solution, salt ionizes and interacts with gluten proteins to produce a stronger and tougher gluten. Salt is thus a very important dough ingredient. In addition, salt helps to control and moderate yeast fermentation as well as to enhance bread flavor.

—Joseph G. Ponte, Jr., is a professor in the Department of Grain Science and Industry at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. ♦

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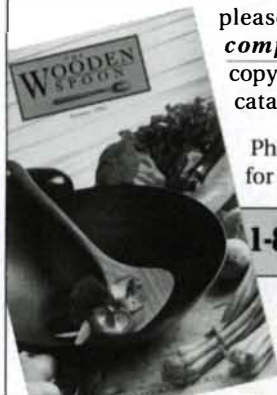
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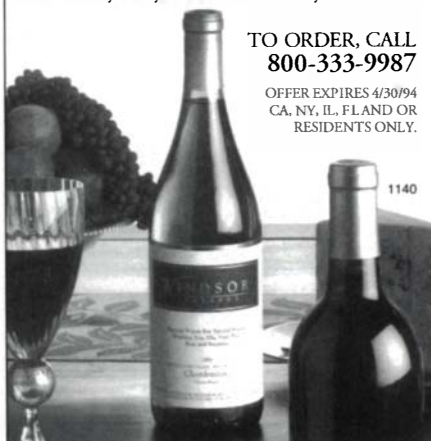
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# Making Stuffed Pasta

A step-by-step guide to preparing regional Italian dishes

BY DANIEL C. ROSATI

**F**lour, water, eggs, and oil. Combine these most basic ingredients and something amazing happens—you create pasta.

I grew up in an Italian-American household, and pasta was a major part of our weekly menu. As a child, I thought pasta came in two forms, the dry commercial style (or *maccherone* as we referred to all dry pasta) or frozen cavatelli and ravioli. It wasn't until I was seventeen, on a trip to Italy, that I encountered fresh pasta. Walking through the streets of Florence, I came upon three old women seated behind a makeshift table outside a rustic trattoria. From a distance, I thought they were shaping small figures out of clay. In fact, they were making tortellini. That inspired me to learn to make pasta myself. Later I was able to hone my skills during the seven years I spent as assistant to cooking authority Giuliano Bugialli, who's made a special study of regional Italian pasta dishes.

As a cooking instructor, most of the classes I teach are on authentic regional Italian cuisine, and the most commonly requested pasta dishes are stuffed pastas, or *pasta ripiena*, as they are known in Italy. Of the three I'm about to share with you, two come from neighboring provinces in the northern part of Italy's peninsula: *pansoti* (see photo on p. 24) from Liguria and *cappelletti* (as shown on p. 25) from Emilia-Romagna; the third, *culingiones* (pictured on p. 23), comes from the island of Sardinia, off the western coast in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Each is the most common stuffed pasta of its region. I've chosen them not only to show Italy's culinary diversity, but also to emphasize traditional Italian techniques, ones that I hope you will practice and enjoy in your kitchen.

*Use fresh pasta. At left: Just-rolled dough is the best guarantee of a tight seal when making stuffed pasta. Work with a small amount of dough at a time to prevent drying. A fourth of the dough recipe yields a ribbon several feet long.*



*Liquid ingredients and flavorings go into a well made in the flour. Here, saffron threads ground to powder and mixed with warm water flavor the pasta for culingiones.*

You'll notice that the sauces for these pastas are uncomplicated. Their purpose is to enhance, whereas the sauce for a dry pasta is meant to be a larger part of the final dish.

## GROUND RULES FOR STUFFED PASTAS

Regardless of the shape of stuffed pasta you're making and its filling, observing the following guidelines will ensure your success.

**Start with fresh pasta**—When making these stuffed delicacies, I believe it's important to use

homemade pasta, rather than sheets bought from a pasta shop. You'll get a better seal with a just-stretched ribbon of dough that hasn't been allowed to dry.

To avoid excessive drying, work with only a quarter of the dough at a time. Have the filling and the sauce ready *before* making the pasta. Most fillings and sauces can be made a day ahead; this breaks up the work load considerably. Fillings should be cold when you use them, otherwise they'll soften the pasta.

**Get a tight seal**—Aim for a dough-to-dough seal, which is the best insurance against the pasta opening during cooking and spilling its contents into the boiling water. If you must moisten the pasta, don't paint water on with your finger—this gives a precarious seal at best. Instead, mist the pasta lightly with water from a spray bottle. Never use egg, as it has a large concentration of fat that inhibits a proper seal.

After stuffing, allow the pasta to dry on a floured cloth or paper towel for about twenty minutes, or until a leather-like skin forms. This keeps the pasta from sticking when it's cooking or in storage.

**Freeze if you want, but not for long**—You can freeze uncooked stuffed pasta for up to two weeks.

Thereafter, the pasta becomes very brittle and breaks apart when cooking. If I'm going to freeze pasta, I use a mixture of two parts all-purpose and one part durum (also called semolina) flours. The higher protein content of the durum flour creates a stronger dough that holds up better in storage. Freeze the pastas on trays, then store them in tightly sealed plastic bags.

**Cook in plenty of salted water**—Use an abundance of water, at least seven quarts per pound of pasta. Pasta, rice, and grains exude excess starch as they cook, and an insufficient amount of water leaves a gummy coating on the food. Foam rising to the surface indicates you haven't used enough water. Always start with cold water, since hot tap water can include a large amount of sediment and sour-tasting mineral deposits that accumulate in your water heater. Boiling the water for a long time also imparts an off taste.

When the water comes to a rolling boil, season it with about five tablespoons of coarse salt. This may sound like a lot, but remember, you're seasoning the *water*, not the pasta. Cooked in unsalted water, starch-based foods taste unappetizingly bland. If you're in doubt about the amount of salt, taste the water. It should taste salty, but not so much as to make your mouth pucker or tears spring to your eyes. I use kosher salt, which has a more subtle flavor than table salt. Never add oil to the cooking water or your sauce won't adhere to the pasta.

Adding the salt will momentarily halt the boiling. When the water returns to a rolling boil, add the pasta, stirring gently with a long-handled spoon to prevent it from settling on the bottom of the pot. Cook just until the edges of the pasta are tender, usually about four minutes after the water resumes boiling. Stuffed pasta is delicate, so don't dump it into a colander. Instead, retrieve the pasta with a wide hand-held strainer, shake gently to dispel excess water, sauce it, and serve.

## MAKING THE DOUGH

I prefer to make pasta on a wooden pastry board or a pastry cloth (both readily available at houseware stores). It's easy to work dough on these surfaces because flour gets into the pores of the wood and the weave of the cloth, creating a nonstick surface. A plastic-laminate kitchen counter is fine, too, but



*Wet ingredients are mixed together, and then flour is gradually pulled in from the sides of the well.*



*The goal is a dough that is elastic and smooth, no longer sticky but not yet stiff.*



*Before stretching the dough, carefully fold it to the exact width of the rollers and pass it through one last time on the widest setting.*

you'll need to keep it lightly floured as you work.

From the time you start mixing the dough until you've completed the rolling, you're incorporating flour. How much flour you actually end up working into the dough depends on several variables: the humidity, the flour's moisture content, your method and speed of work. If you use up all the flour called for in the recipe, add small amounts to your work surface as needed.

**Mixing the dough**—I like to mix pasta the traditional way, right on my pastry board. Place the flour in a mound and make a well in the center that's large enough to hold the liquid ingredients. Pressing a one-cup measure into the flour and moving it around makes a deep, straight-sided well with an even layer of flour on the bottom. If a recipe calls for two types of flour, mix them together before forming the mound.

All the liquid ingredients go into the well, along with any flavorings or seasonings called for in the recipe (see photo on p. 21). Using a fork, slowly combine the liquid ingredients until the mixture resembles a thin, smooth batter. Next, begin bringing in flour from the sides of the well (see photo above). Don't rush this step. The more time you take, the more flour you'll incorporate; this not

only makes the most of your ingredients but also results in a wonderfully smooth dough. Continue until you have a wet dough, and your fork is doing nothing but moving this mass around. Now you're ready to knead by hand.

**Kneading by hand**—Chances are, you'll have flour left on the board. Before proceeding, sift this remaining flour to clean it of dried dough particles, which make lumps in your pasta if not removed. To avoid incorporating air into the flour, which I believe can dry the dough out before it's taken up enough flour, I'm careful not to raise the sifter from the board. I simply move it from side to side.

Place the soft dough so that half of it is on the cleaned flour. With a lightly floured palm, press the heel of your hand into the center of the dough. Fold the dough toward you and give it a quarter turn clockwise. Repeat this folding and turning until you have a smooth, elastic dough that's no longer sticky. When you can press a finger into the center of the dough and it springs back, hand-kneading is complete (see photo above, center).

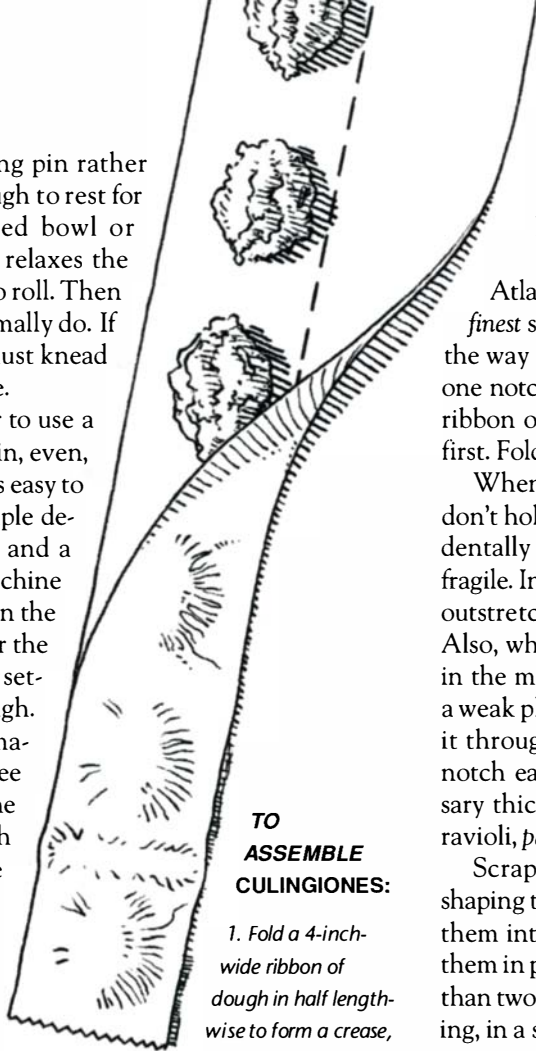


If you stretch pasta with a rolling pin rather than a pasta machine, allow the dough to rest for fifteen minutes under an inverted bowl or wrapped in plastic film first. This relaxes the gluten and makes the dough easier to roll. Then proceed to roll the pasta as you normally do. If you're using a pasta machine, you must knead the dough a second time by machine.

**Kneading by machine**—I prefer to use a pasta machine because it makes a thin, even, nicely squared ribbon of dough that's easy to work with. A pasta machine is a simple device consisting of two steel rollers and a crank. A knob on one side of the machine controls the amount of space between the rollers. The widest setting is used for the second kneading, while the narrower settings are used for stretching the dough. Two brands of hand-cranked pasta machines are available in this country (see Resources, p. 25), the Atlas and the Imperia. I use an Imperia. They both work the same way, but there's one important difference. The Atlas has one more setting for stretching the dough, which I find too thin for making most stuffed pastas.

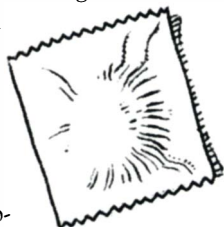
With the machine securely clamped to your counter or table, adjust the rollers to their widest setting. Work with a quarter of the dough at a time, and leave the rest wrapped securely in plastic to prevent it from drying.

Lightly flour the dough and crank it through the rollers. You'll have a wide, elongated ribbon of even thickness. Dredge one side through the remaining flour, place it on the board with narrow ends at left and right, and fold into thirds. This will give you a triple thickness of pasta with a light coating of flour all around and a thin layer of flour sandwiched in the center. Starting at the end nearest you, press the air out with your fingertips. Pass the dough through the machine narrow end first. In the beginning, the dough will have a sticky texture and a rough surface. Repeat until you have a smooth and very elastic dough. (Fold the dough in the same direction each time to ensure that with every run through the machine, a little more flour gets kneaded into the dough.) It may take anywhere from five to a dozen passes through the rollers for the pasta to reach the right consistency. It should feel velvety soft, just like a baby's skin. Fold the pasta into thirds again, making sure it is the same width as the machine's rollers, and pass it through



#### TO ASSEMBLE CULINGIONES:

1. Fold a 4-inch-wide ribbon of dough in half lengthwise to form a crease, then unfold.
2. Place level tablespoons of the filling an inch apart along one side of the dough.
3. Fold the dough over to cover and press between each mound with a finger. Use a crimped pastry cutter to cut the filled dough into 2-inch squares.
4. Gently press the edges of each ravioli to ensure a proper seal.



one last time at the first setting (see bottom photo on opposite page). Now your kneaded dough is ready to be stretched.

**Stretching the dough**—If you're using an Atlas, stretch the dough only to the *next to the finest* setting. If you're using an Imperia, take it all the way to the finest setting. Tighten the rollers by one notch from the widest setting. Lightly flour the ribbon of dough and pass it through, narrow end first. Folding is no longer necessary.

When guiding the pasta through the machine, don't hold it with your fingertips, which could accidentally tear the dough as it gets thinner and more fragile. Instead, allow it to rest on the L shape of your outstretched hand between thumb and index finger. Also, while stretching the pasta, once the dough is in the machine, don't stop turning or you'll create a weak place. Continue to flour the pasta and crank it through the rollers, tightening the setting by a notch each time, until you've obtained the necessary thickness. At this point, it's time to form the ravioli, *pansoti*, or whatever it is you're making.

Scraps and trimmings of dough left over after shaping the stuffed pastas can be used in soups. I cut them into strips, dry them completely, then freeze them in plastic bags. Though pasta stored for longer than two weeks in the freezer may crack when cooking, in a soup broken pasta is fine.



**Culingiones** are Sardinian ravioli stuffed with an eggplant-walnut filling and layered with chunky tomato sauce, cheese, and herbs. See the recipe on the next page.

## CULINGIONES, OR RAVIOLI DI MELANZANE

(Sardinian eggplant-stuffed ravioli)

I first encountered this dish in a Sardinian cooking class taught by Giuliano Bugialli. Due to the diverse ancient cultures that occupied Sardinia, there are many different spellings for these ravioli, and certainly as many variations in how they're made. This recipe, from my friend Gianna Rosetti, whose family is from Sardinia, uses ricotta cheese and ground walnuts in the stuffing. Serves four.

### FOR THE FILLING:

1 lb. eggplant, peeled and cut into ½-in. slices  
Coarse salt (kosher is good)  
1½ cups vegetable oil  
¼ cup walnuts  
1½ cups ricotta cheese  
½ cup grated Fiore Sardo or Pecorino Romano cheese  
2 large eggs  
1 large egg yolk  
5 large basil leaves, chopped coarse  
10 mint leaves, chopped coarse  
10 sprigs Italian parsley, leaves only, chopped coarse  
Pepper

### FOR THE SAUCE:

2 lb. Italian plum tomatoes, chopped  
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
1 clove garlic, mashed  
5 large basil leaves, chopped coarse  
Salt and pepper

### FOR THE PASTA:

2 cups unbleached flour  
1 cup fine semolina flour



The pasta for pansoti is sometimes made with white wine, which gives it a delicate color and aroma. This Ligurian specialty is stuffed with a mixture of greens and cheese, and sauced with a pesto-like blend of walnuts and pine nuts.

4 large egg yolks  
½ tsp. saffron threads, ground in a mortar  
½ cup warm water  
¼ tsp. table salt

### TO FINISH:

5 large basil leaves, chopped coarse  
5 large mint leaves, chopped coarse  
10 sprigs Italian parsley, leaves only, chopped coarse  
½ cup grated Fiore Sardo or Pecorino Romano cheese

To make the filling—Layer the eggplant slices in a medium-size bowl, sprinkling each layer well with coarse salt. On top of the eggplant, set a plate slightly smaller than the bowl and place a heavy object (like a large can of tomatoes) on the plate. Let stand for 20 min. to extract any bitter juices that may be in the eggplant. Rinse under cold water and pat dry. Cut into ½-inch cubes.

In a large frying pan, heat the oil over medium heat until very hot. Add the eggplant and toss constantly with a spoon until well browned. Remove the eggplant from the pan immediately and drain on a double layer of paper towels. Cool completely, and put in a large bowl. Grind the walnuts fine in a mortar and pestle or food processor.

Add the cheeses, walnuts, eggs and egg yolk, basil, mint, and parsley. Mix well and season with pepper.

Refrigerate at least 20 min.

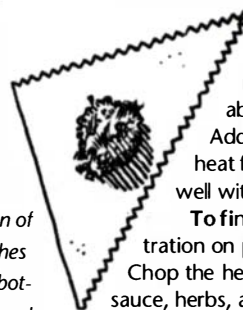
To prepare the sauce—In a saucepan, heat the oil over a low flame. Add the mashed garlic to the pan and sauté briefly, about 1 min. Do not allow the garlic to brown.

Add the chopped tomatoes and cook over low heat for 20 min. Add the basil leaves and season well with salt and pepper.

To finish—Fill and shape the pasta (see the illustration on p. 23). Cook in plenty of well-salted water. Chop the herbs coarse. Alternate layers of cooked pasta, sauce, herbs, and cheese.

### TO ASSEMBLE PANSOTI:

1. Trim a ribbon of dough to 4 inches wide. Fold the bottom corner up and cut along the vertical leg of the triangle you've created.
2. Now unfold and cut the square diagonally to make two triangles.
3. Place a teaspoon of the filling in the center of each triangle. Fold the triangle in half, bringing the two ends of the longest side together. Press to seal all around.



## PANSOTI IN SALSA DI NOCI

(Ligurian ravioli with walnut sauce)

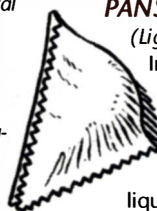
In Ligurian dialect *pansoti* means potbellied. Traditionally, the filling is prepared with *preboggion*, a mixture of wild herbs and greens sold in bundles. A less common but equally authentic version is to use dry white wine as part of the liquid in the pasta. If you want to try this, substitute wine for up to half the amount of water. Serves four.

### FOR THE FILLING:

2 lb. mixed greens (beet tops, spinach, watercress, Swiss chard, dandelion)  
Coarse salt (kosher is good)  
10 large basil leaves, chopped coarse  
10 large borage leaves, chopped coarse (optional)  
¼ cup fresh marjoram leaves, chopped coarse  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
1 cup ricotta cheese  
2 large eggs  
½ cup fresh bread crumbs  
Salt and pepper  
Nutmeg

### FOR THE PASTA:

3 cups unbleached flour  
3 large eggs  
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil  
½ tsp. salt  
½ cup cold water (or equal parts water and dry white wine)





#### FOR THE SAUCE:

1½ cups walnuts  
½ cup pine nuts  
1 clove garlic  
¾ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
20 sprigs Italian parsley, leaves only  
¼ cup unsalted butter, softened  
1 cup heavy cream  
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil  
Salt and pepper

**To make the filling**—Rinse and drain the greens, removing any large stems. In a large pot, bring to a boil 3 qt. water and season well with salt. Add the greens and cook just until wilted, about 4 min. Drain and then rinse under cold water until cooled. Squeeze out as much excess water as possible. Chop fine.

Put the greens in a large bowl and add the basil, borage, marjoram, garlic, cheeses, eggs, and bread crumbs. Mix well and season with salt, pepper, and freshly ground nutmeg. Refrigerate at least 20 min.

**To prepare the sauce**—Grind the walnuts and pine nuts fine in a large mortar and pestle or a food processor. Add the garlic and mash or process until well blended. Add the Parmesan and parsley and blend well. Transfer the mixture to a medium-size bowl. Add the butter, heavy cream, and olive oil and stir until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

**To finish**—Fill and shape the pasta (see opposite page). Cook in plenty of well-salted water. Gently toss cooked pasta in the prepared sauce, and serve immediately.

#### CAPPELLETTI IN BRODO

(Cappelletti in broth)

Cappelletti, or “little hats,” are a bit larger north and west of the city of Bologna, where they are known as *tortellini*. Cappelletti are traditionally served on holidays or special occasions, when there are extra hands to help shape the pasta. If possible, use full-flavored, homemade broth. I prefer *parmigiano reggiano* to the domestic Parmesans. Serves four.

#### FOR THE FILLING:

2 cups chicken broth  
1 bay leaf  
Salt and pepper  
8 oz. boneless, skinless chicken breasts  
2 oz. prosciutto, in one piece  
2 oz. mortadella, in one piece  
6 Tbs. ricotta cheese  
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese  
1 large egg  
⅛ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg

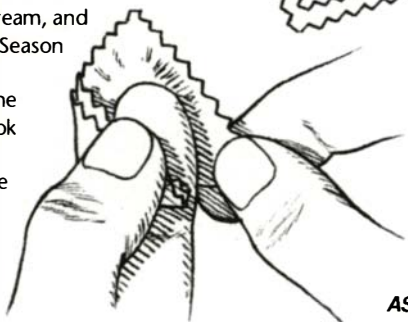
#### FOR THE PASTA:

3 cups unbleached flour  
3 large eggs  
3 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil  
¼ tsp. salt

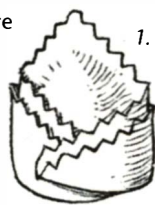
#### TO SERVE:

2 qt. chicken broth  
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

**To make the filling**—In a medium-size pot, bring to a simmer 2 cups of the chicken broth. Add the bay leaf, season with salt and pepper and simmer 5 min. Add the chicken



#### TO ASSEMBLE CAPPELLETTI:



1. Cut a 4-inch-wide ribbon of dough into 2-inch squares.

2. Place a ¼ teaspoon of the filling in the center of each square. Fold the square in half so that two opposite corners almost meet. They should miss by ⅛ inch. Press to seal all around.

3. With the folded edge as your base, wrap the triangle around the tip of your index finger.

4. Overlap the two base corners and press to seal.

and simmer 20 min. Remove the chicken from the broth and cool completely. Mince the chicken, prosciutto, and mortadella and put in a large bowl. Add the cheeses and the egg. Mix well and season with pepper and nutmeg.

**To serve**—Fill and shape the *cappelletti* (see illustration at left). Cook in the remaining chicken broth (do not add salt). Serve in soup bowls with some of the broth and a tablespoon of freshly grated Parmesan over each serving.

#### RESOURCES

*The Atlas pasta machine is available at well-stocked kitchen shops. The following stores also sell the Imperia and will ship:*

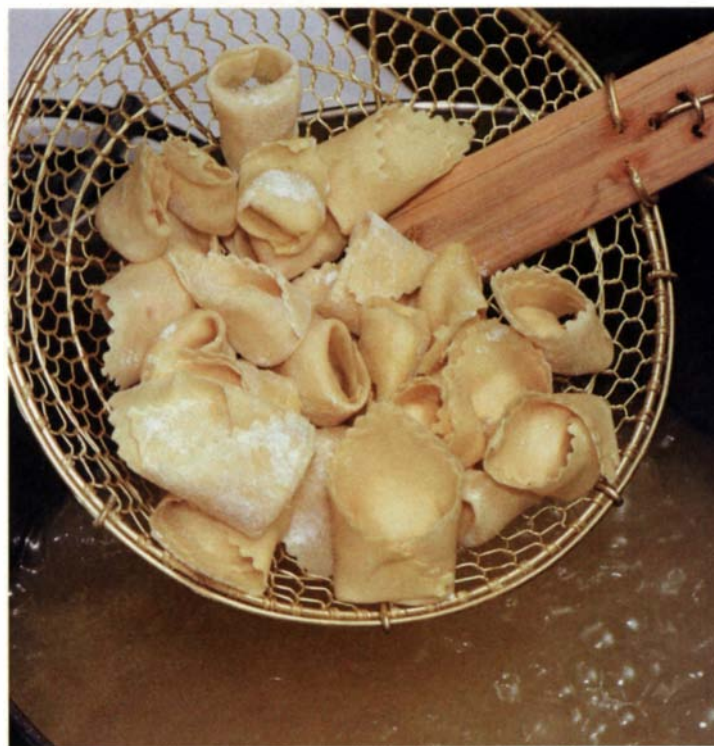
Bridge Kitchenware, 214 East 52nd St., New York, NY 10022; 800/274-3435. Catalog \$3.

Cook's Nook/Epicurean, 237 Hullen Mall, Fort Worth, TX 76132; 817/292-7213. No catalog.

Fante's, 1006 S. 9th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147; 800/878-5557. No catalog.

European Gift & Housewares (718/325-5597) imports the Imperia and can direct you to the store nearest you.

Daniel C. Rosati teaches classes in regional Italian cooking at the New School for Social Research in New York City. He spent seven years as assistant to Italian cooking authority Giuliano Bugialli, both in New York and in Florence, Italy. ♦



Cappelletti are cooked and served in rich chicken broth. A wide skimmer does a gentle job of easing stuffed pastas into the pot and retrieving them three minutes later.

# Fish Fast and Simple

Pan-steam for moist, tasty results in minutes

BY GARY A. COLEY

*Ready in minutes. Pan-steamed recipes don't take long to prepare and cook. Flounder with bacon, red onion, and citrus over wilted spinach is a light dish with clean, refreshing flavors (recipe on p. 28).*



***Pan-steaming yields moist fish.** The flounder fillet shown above is briefly sautéed, then covered and steamed off the heat for several minutes. Ingredients that don't need much cooking, like the citrus and red-onion slices, are added just before covering with the lid.*

I've always loved seafood, but I rarely have the time or the energy to create elaborate dishes. To complicate matters, it's very easy to overcook fish. Cooked too long, fish turns dry or rubbery and loses its delicate flavor. I wanted a way to cook fish that would be quick and easy, that would yield moist results, and that would also allow me to use a range of ingredients for a variety of flavors. Drawing on my experience as a chef, I came up with a cooking method I have grown to love for many types of fish and shellfish—pan-steaming, a combination of two cooking techniques. I sauté the fish briefly in a very hot pan; then I turn off the heat, clap a lid on the

pan, and let the fish steam in its own juices for a few minutes. It comes out succulent and evenly cooked. Vegetables, herbs, and seasonings go in first or last, depending on how much time they need to cook.

The best things about the pan-steaming method are that it can be so easy, it makes overcooking almost impossible, and it allows me to produce a tasty meal for several people in half an hour or less.

## **TWO-STEP COOKING METHOD**

Because the cooking time is so short, it's important to prepare all the ingredients before turning on the heat. I chop or slice vegetables to sizes that will cook







quickly, mince garlic and herbs, and get all my seasonings within arm's reach, ready to add to the pan.

The equipment for pan-steaming is simple and basic—a heavy pan or skillet, eight to ten inches across, with a tight-fitting lid. A heavy pan is important because it must retain as much heat as possible to continue cooking the fish after the heat has been turned off. My cast-iron skillet works like a dream.

When I'm ready to cook, I set my skillet over high heat, add a few tablespoons of oil, and wait two minutes. The pan is hot enough when the surface of the oil starts to move, or when a drop of cold water bounces around as soon as it hits the oil. For scallops, I like to get the pan even hotter because I want to sear them to a golden brown, so I wait until the oil starts to smoke just a little.

Whether I'm cooking shellfish or fish, I sear it on one side, turn it, cover the pan, and turn off the heat. The fish continues to cook in the residual heat, leaving me with a succulent piece of flesh that isn't hard or dry. If your stove is electric, be sure to take the pan off the burner when you turn off the heat. Otherwise, the fish will overcook.

## SELECTING FISH

Pan-steaming works for almost any kind of shellfish or fillet. I get best results with fish that isn't too large



or too thick (half an inch or less for fillets). I even cook fish steaks this way, but I sauté them longer to ensure they get done.

The farmers' market (we're blessed with several here in Atlanta) is my usual inspiration. I go to the seafood section and choose what looks good, always searching for the freshest product of the day. Smell the fish; it should smell fresh and not strong.

**Shellfish**—Shrimp, scallops, mussels, oysters, clams, and crayfish all cook very fast, in just several minutes in most cases. Always remove shellfish from their shells before pan-steaming. When peeling shrimp, though, I like to leave the shell on the last little tail section because I like the look. Most types of scallops, typically sold without their shells, are great for pan-steaming. Sea scallops are my favorite because they're more tender and usually have more flavor than bay scallops. Also, since sea scallops are large, I'm less liable to overcook them. If you use bay scallops, the larger ones are better than the tiny ones, which cook too fast and can get very dry.

**Fillets**—If no thicker than half an inch, fillets can cook as quickly as shellfish. Even thicker fillets take no more than ten minutes from the time I put them in the pan. Before cooking fillets, I check for bones by running my fingertips over the flesh. I remove any I find by pulling them out with a pair of tweezers (see the photo on p. 28).

**Steaks**—I opt for fish steaks that are about three-quarters to an inch thick. Thicker steaks need a little longer time over direct heat to ensure that they're cooked through to the center. For example, I cook soy-marinated mackerel steaks for five minutes before turning them. Then I cut off the heat and put the lid on for another five minutes.

*First, sauté ingredients that need longer cooking. Vegetables or seasonings that need cooking to soften them or to release their flavors go in first. Here, onions, tomatoes, olives, capers, and jalapeños are sautéed for Red Snapper Vera Cruz (recipe on p. 29).*





Photo: Ruth Lively

**Check fillets for bones.** Some fish, like red snapper, hold tightly to a few of their bones. Heavy-duty tweezers or small needle-nose pliers are good for pulling out recalcitrant bones.

**A piquant medley tops Red Snapper Vera Cruz.** Olives, jalapeños, and capers add punch to simmered tomatoes and onions, while cinnamon, cloves, and bay leaf lend an aromatic Caribbean flavor.



## ADDING OTHER INGREDIENTS

When I prepare seafood this way, I let my imagination run wild. The flavors and ingredients that can be added are as varied as the seafood itself. Some that I like to use are fresh herbs, garlic, olives, capers, tomatoes, mushrooms, and the juice and zest of lemons and limes.

When to add other ingredients depends on how much they need to be cooked. For example, I'll sauté sliced mushrooms or onions first, let them cook until they're almost done, then push them to the side and add my fish. Tomatoes can go in either before or after the fish, depending on whether I want to cook them down or just heat them. Sometimes I cook other ingredients first, and then remove them from the pan, either because they'd burn (like the bacon in the flounder recipe below) or because they release liquid that would interfere with the sautéing of the fish. For example, I make the tomato topping for the Red Snapper Vera Cruz first, and then empty it into a dish while I sear the fish. In most cases, though, sauces are simple: usually the pan juices reduced over high heat after the seafood has been removed.

**Scallops with basil and tomatoes**—I know it's the middle of winter, but I'd like to tell you about one of my favorite pan-steamed recipes, a simple combination of sea scallops, fresh basil, and vine-ripened tomatoes. You'll just have to wait until summer to try it.

To serve two people, use about twenty large sea

scallops, two medium tomatoes and eight to ten basil leaves. Peel the tomatoes, cut them in quarters, squeeze out the juice and seeds, then roughly chop the flesh. Cut the basil into strips. Rinse the scallops and season them with salt, white pepper, and a squeeze of lemon juice. When everything's ready, heat a few tablespoons of olive oil in your pan. When it's just barely smoking, pat the scallops dry and add them to the pan. They brown almost immediately. Turn them over and add the tomatoes and basil. Shake the pan to disperse the ingredients evenly and season with salt and pepper. Remove the pan from the heat, put the lid on, and let everything steam for four or five minutes. The whole process takes less than a quarter of an hour. Serve the scallops over pasta with a sprinkling of Parmesan.

## FLOUNDER FILLETS WITH BACON, RED ONION, AND CITRUS OVER WILTED SPINACH

This dish is almost a complete meal. Serve it with small, boiled red potatoes, a salad, and good bread. A California sauvignon blanc with a fair amount of acidity, one that has pronounced herbal or grassy overtones, would hold up well to the citrus and onions. *Serves four.*

**4 flounder fillets, 6 to 7 oz. each**  
**2 oranges (or 12 to 16 segments)**  
**2 grapefruit (or 12 to 16 segments)**  
**8 slices lean bacon, diced into ¼-in. pieces**  
**½ tsp. salt**  
**¼ tsp. white pepper**  
**1 large or 2 medium red onions, sliced as thin as possible**  
**1 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon**  
**1 to 1½ lb. fresh spinach, washed and drained**



**Prepare the ingredients.** Trim the edges of the flounder to remove any traces of skin. Prepare the citrus by cutting away the rind and pith, then cut individual segments away from the membrane. Put into a bowl and set aside. Sauté the bacon slowly in a heavy skillet until golden and crispy, stirring occasionally. Drain on paper towels and set aside. Reserve the bacon fat for cooking the fish and spinach later.

**Cook the flounder.** Using the same heavy skillet, bring 2 Tbs. of the bacon fat up to temperature over high heat. Lightly salt and pepper the fillets and place them in the hot skillet. Sear well on one side, about 1 min., and then turn the fish. Sprinkle the sliced onion around the fish. Add the fruit and its juice, the bacon, and the tarragon. Cover with a tight-fitting lid. Remove from the heat and let steam for 5 to 6 min., depending on the thickness of the fillet.

**Wilt the spinach.** Meanwhile, in another skillet heat 2 Tbs. reserved bacon fat over a medium-high setting. (If you run out of bacon fat, supplement with vegetable oil.) Once the fat is hot, add the spinach. Toss it with a spatula just until the spinach is warm and has begun to wilt.

**Compose the servings.** Arrange the spinach on warm plates. By this time the flounder should be done. Lay it on the spinach and place fruit segments and onions loosely over the fish. Spoon the bacon, the tarragon, and the pan juices over each portion.

### RED SNAPPER VERA CRUZ

Serve this spicy dish alongside rice that's topped with fresh chopped herbs and butter. Grapefruit segments and avocado wedges on Bibb lettuce and a simple lime dressing make a refreshing salad. Bread or hot flour tortillas complete the meal. The fruitiness of a well-made dry gewürztraminer plays off the spiciness of this dish. *Serves four.*

**4 red snapper fillets, 6 to 7 oz. each**

**Fresh lemon juice**

**Salt**

**6 Tbs. olive oil**

**2 medium yellow onions, sliced thin**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

**8 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and cut into strips**

**24 green olives, pitted and chopped rough**

**2 Tbs. capers**

**2 pickled jalapeños, seeded and sliced**

**1 to 2 Tbs. pickling juice from the jalapeños**

**1 tsp. dried thyme**

**1 tsp. dried marjoram**

**2 bay leaves**

**½ tsp. ground cinnamon**

**2 whole cloves**

**½ tsp. coarse black pepper**

**2 Tbs. chopped parsley, plus extra leaves for garnish**

**1 cup fish stock or canned clam juice**

**¼ cup olive oil**

**Prepare the fillets.** Check the red snapper for bones and remove any with a pair of tweezers or needle-nose pliers. Sprinkle with lemon juice and salt, and set aside.

**Make the sauce.** In a large, heavy skillet, heat 6 Tbs. of oil. Sauté the onions until soft, 6 to 7 min., over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and cook 1 min. Add the tomatoes and simmer 4 to 5 min. Then add the olives, capers, jalapeños, pickling juice, herbs, spices, chopped parsley, and fish stock or clam juice. Simmer uncovered for 7 to 8 min. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and set aside in a warm place.

**Cook the fillets.** In the same pan, heat ¼ cup oil about 2 min., until it starts to shimmer. Sauté the snapper, skin side down, 2 min. and then turn over. Cover the fish with the tomato mixture. Bring to a simmer, cover tightly,

remove from the heat, and let steam for about 3 min. With a slotted spoon, arrange the fillets on warm plates and spoon the sauce over them. Garnish with parsley.

### LEMON SHRIMP WITH MUSHROOMS

For this simple combination, the lemon juice and zest add a wonderful fresh taste, while the mushrooms contribute interesting texture. A fruity chardonnay with a lot of body would go well with the tang of the lemon and the sweetness of the shrimp. *Serves four.*

**32 to 40 medium shrimp or 24 to 28 large shrimp**

**2 lemons**

**6 Tbs. olive oil**

**7 oz. crimini or regular white mushrooms, sliced**

**Salt and pepper**

**4 to 5 sprigs of parsley, chopped rough**



**Prepare the ingredients.** Peel the shrimp except for the last remaining tail section. Remove the zest of half a lemon with a fine zester, or use a knife, and then cut the zest into fine julienne. Juice the lemons.

**Cook the mushrooms and shrimp.** In a large skillet set over medium-high heat, sauté the mushrooms in 4 Tbs. oil for about 1 min., until they begin to release their juices. Push to the sides of the pan. Add 2 Tbs. oil and bring it up to temperature. Add the shrimp and sauté about 1 min. on both sides. Season with salt and pepper. Add lemon zest and juice, and parsley. Cover tightly and remove from heat. Let steam about 6 min.

*Shellfish lend themselves to simple preparation. Here, shrimp are dressed with lemon juice and zest, mushrooms, and herbs. Mussels, clams, or scallops would all make delicious substitutes for the shrimp.*

Gary A. Coley trained at Dumas Père school for chefs in Glenview, Illinois, and apprenticed for three years at the Ritz-Carlton in Chicago. He later worked at Wicklein's and ran Cornelia's, both small Chicago restaurants. Coley now lives in Atlanta, where he is a private chef, preparing dinners for small parties in private homes. Wine recommendations are from Don Hepler, wine manager at Amity Wines & Spirit Co. in New Haven, Connecticut. ♦

# Add Zest with Mexican Red-Chile Sauce

Roasting and puréeing turns  
dried chiles into versatile flavoring

BY ALEJANDRA CISNEROS



*Brilliant broth. Red-chile sauce transforms chicken soup into a piquant homestyle Mexican dish called clemole.*

Photos: Suzanne Roman



**W**ithout the burn of chile pepper, food tastes flat to me. Chiles make the mouth come alive and bring out the flavors of other ingredients. Here in Cuernavaca, Mexico, at least twenty types of peppers are found in markets. They're available fresh, smoked, pickled, powdered, and dried. For most of my everyday cooking, I use fresh green chiles, but for special occasions I turn to the dried red ones. I find that dried chiles have a deeper, more subtle taste than fresh.

The easiest way to extract the flavor and fire from dried chiles is to make them into a sauce. The red-chile sauce can then be served as a cold table salsa, used to coat tortillas and make enchiladas, or added to a wide variety of dishes, from poached eggs to pork stew. Making the sauce is the first step in preparing many traditional and improvised Mexican dishes.

### DRIED-CHILE CHOICES

Any type of dried chile can be made into a sauce. Most of the time, I cook with *guajillo* (*gwa-hee-yoh*) chiles because they aren't too hot and they have a touch of sweetness. *Guajillos* are about four to five inches long, deep red, narrow, and smooth skinned. New Mexico and California chiles, which are more widely available in the United States, closely resemble *guajillo* chiles in appearance and flavor. Sometimes I use *ancho* or *mulato* chiles, which are sweeter and meatier than *guajillo* chiles, or *pasilla* chiles, which are very spicy. The small, fiery-hot chile *de arbol* can also be made into a potent sauce. Use whichever kind is available in your area. Each has its own flavor, but the various types can be interchanged or mixed together in dried-chile sauce.

Look for chiles that are soft, pliable, and evenly colored. Watch out for patches of light orange, which show where bugs got at the drying chiles. Since they remain in good condition for weeks in a loosely closed plastic bag, I buy chiles by the quarter kilo and keep them on hand. In U.S. supermarkets, dried chiles are often sold in three-ounce plastic bags in the produce section. (For mail-order sources, see p. 34.)

### MAKING THE SAUCE

For one batch of red-chile sauce, use eight to ten *guajillo*, New Mexico, or California chiles, or five to seven of the meatier *ancho*, *mulato*, or *pasilla* chiles. Air-dried chiles can be dusty; simply wipe them off with a damp cloth. Pull out the woody stems. I used to take out the seeds and veins, but now I leave them in because they give more substance to the sauce. The only exception to this is with chile *pasillas*. Since *pasillas* can be very hot, I take out the seeds and veins so that the finished dish won't be too spicy.



#### Cleaning the chiles.

The author uses a damp cloth to clean off the dust that settled on the chiles as they air-dried. Good chiles are evenly colored and pliable.



**Roasting.** To deepen the flavor, the dried chiles are roasted briefly in a little oil until they soften and give off a pungent chile aroma. Take care not to burn the chiles, or they will turn bitter.



**Puréeing.** The roasted chile peppers are torn into pieces and chopped in a blender with garlic, roasted tomato, and water.



***Straining.** To get a smooth sauce, the author presses the puréed chiles through a strainer to remove the rough seeds and skins.*

### MEXICAN RED-CHILE SAUCE

10 guajillo, New Mexico, or California chiles (or 7 ancho, mulato, or pasilla chiles)  
Vegetable oil  
1 tomato  
1 clove garlic  
1 cup water

**Roast the whole chiles** in a little bit of oil in a frying pan over low heat. You can also roast them in a dry pan, but they are more likely to burn and turn bitter. Cook the chiles one at a time for a minute or two, flipping them over and pressing them against the pan with a spatula. Roast the chiles until they soften and release their aroma, but be careful not to let them burn. Turn on the fan over the stove: chile fumes can sting your eyes and throat.

**Cut the tomato** in half lengthwise and roast it in the same pan that the chiles were in. Tomato gives substance to the sauce. I usually use one plum tomato for every batch of sauce, but if you want to make a milder sauce you can add another tomato. Cook the tomato for several minutes, flipping the pieces occasionally until they're soft but not mushy.

**Rip the chiles into pieces** and put them in a blender or food processor. Add the tomato, garlic, and water. Blend until the chiles are a smooth purée, which takes about two minutes.

**Pour the puréed sauce through a sieve** to remove skin and seeds. Tap on the strainer with a finger or spoon to move the thick sauce through. If you intend to use the sauce as a salsa to spoon onto food, strain the purée into a bowl, thin it with a tablespoon or so of water, add salt, and you're done. If you plan to cook it further, strain the chile sauce into a bowl or right into the cooking pot. Pour a cup or two of meat broth or water into the strainer and, with a spoon, press the purée against the strainer to force

more of the chile through. Since the sauce will cook down, it doesn't matter if it's a little watery to start.

### USING AS COLD SALSA

Red-chile sauce is always a welcome addition to my table. It finds its way onto eggs and beans at breakfast, over rice and pasta at the mid-afternoon dinner, and into soups, sandwiches, and tacos at supper. Some people in my family like food very spicy, and others prefer just a touch of chile. With salsa on the table, everyone can choose how much heat to add. This salsa keeps a week in the refrigerator, but at the end of that time you can always bring it to a boil, and it will be good for another week.

### COATING TORTILLAS

The flavor of red-chile sauce combines beautifully with corn tortillas. I like to make *dobladitos*, which are corn tortillas dipped in warm chile sauce, folded in quarters and topped with grated cheese and rings of raw onion. *Dobladitos* are good with almost anything, but I especially like to serve them with roast chicken, along with some rice and vegetables. Sauce-dipped tortillas can also be filled and rolled into tubes to make enchiladas. *Enchilada*, in fact, means "covered with chile." (See recipe next page.)

### COOKING IN THINNED SAUCE

Ingredients absorb the chile flavor more thoroughly when cooked right in the sauce. First thin the sauce



with water or broth so that there's plenty of liquid to cook in. The sauce will thicken as it cooks.

A simple, delicious brunch dish is eggs poached in red-chile sauce. Crack the eggs directly into the thinned sauce. If the eggs aren't completely submerged, splash some more sauce on top. This dish is called *huevos ahogados*—drowning eggs.

Another favorite combination is potatoes and cheese with chile sauce. Fry leftover potatoes and put them in the sauce. Let the mixture cook for five minutes so that the potatoes take on the flavor of the chiles. Just before serving, add chunks of cheese. I like to use *queso fresco*, which is similar to feta or farmer cheese, and *queso añejo*, which is drier. Mild, semisoft cheeses like Gouda or Monterey Jack also work well. For supper I put the potatoes and cheese into warm tortillas and top with chopped onion.

Red chiles are also the base for a popular spicy stew called *carne en adobo* (car-neh n ah-doh-boh). The chile sauce is first seared in oil, and then flavored with vinegar and oregano and thinned with broth. Chunks of pork or beef finish cooking smothered with the thickening *adobo* sauce (see recipe on p. 34).

## SEASONING SOUPS

Red-chile sauce has a rich, concentrated flavor that dominates a dish like the *carne en adobo*. When diluted in a soup, the sauce takes on a different character. The chile has a brighter flavor that plays off the other ingredients. A good example is a dish called *clemole* (cleh-moh-leh), or *mole de olla* (moh-leh deh oi-ya). It's not the thick, rich sauce that we call *mole*, but a soup with a brilliant-red broth. Into the soup go big pieces of zucchini, whole green beans, and pieces of corn on the cob. Every bite has the tang of lime, the kick of chile, the crunch of onion, and the distinctive texture of one of the cooked vegetables (see recipe on p. 34).

Sauce made from dried chiles can be used cold or hot, thick or thin. Oregano works well in most red-chile dishes. I also use *epazote* (eh-pa-soe-teh). If you can find this pungent herb in a Mexican grocery or at an herb nursery, try it, especially in the *clemole*. The rich, spicy chile flavor combines beautifully with fish, chicken, pork, beef, rice, potatoes, eggs, bread, and corn. All the dishes suggested here can be soothed with a topping of cheese and sour cream or brightened with a squirt of fresh lime juice. Avocado adds smooth richness, and raw onion a nice crunch and bite.

## CHICKEN ENCHILADAS

Poached, shredded chicken is a popular filling for enchiladas, and my favorite. Shrimp, pork, and beef also taste wonderful wrapped in the chile-coated tortillas. *Serves four.*



*1½ lb. chicken pieces*  
*2 cloves garlic*  
*1 onion, quartered*  
*½ tsp. salt*  
*12 corn tortillas*  
*¼ cup vegetable oil*  
*1 recipe Mexican Red-Chile Sauce, above*

### TO SERVE:

*1 onion, sliced*  
*⅓ cup cheese (queso añejo, queso fresco, farmer cheese, feta, or mild Parmesan), grated or crumbled*  
*½ cup thick or sour cream*

**Cook the chicken.** Put the chicken pieces in a saucepan and cover it with water. Add the garlic, half the onion, and the salt. Bring the pot to a boil and then lower the heat. Simmer until the chicken is firm, about 20 min. Remove the chicken from the water and let it cool.

**Shred the chicken.** When the chicken is cool enough to handle, tear the meat off the bones. Using both hands, pull the chicken apart along the grain. Keep pulling until you have long, thin strands.

**Fry the tortillas.** Let them first sit out on the counter for a few minutes until they become leathery, which prevents them from absorbing too much oil. Heat the oil in a small frying pan over medium-high heat. Fry the tortillas in the oil until they become soft and pliable. This takes only a few seconds. If you fry them too long, the tortillas become crisp and will break when you try to roll them. Drain the fried tortillas on a paper towel.

**Dip, fill, and roll the tortillas.** Prepare the red-chile sauce, thin it with ½ to 1 cup of water, and heat it in a frying pan. Dip a fried tortilla into the sauce, coating both sides. Don't leave it in the sauce too long, or it will get mushy. Place the tortilla on a plate or nonstaining work surface, put a 1-in. band of chicken on it, and roll it into a cylinder. Repeat with the rest of the tortillas.

**Serve the enchiladas** on a serving platter or directly on a dinner plate, seam-side down. Three or four enchiladas make a good-size serving. You can make them ahead and reheat them, covered with foil, for about 15 min. in a 350°F oven. Top with raw onion slices, cheese, and thick or sour cream. If the onion is sharp, soak the slices in water for 5 min. before serving.

**Enchiladas.** Chewy, chile-coated corn tortillas wrap around poached, shredded chicken. Raw onion gives the dish crunch while fresh cheese, like Mexican queso fresco or American farmer cheese, delivers both tang and creaminess.



**Poached eggs in chile.** Thin the red-chile sauce with water, bring it to a simmer, and then crack the eggs right into it. Splash the tops of the eggs with the hot sauce to cook them faster. For scrambled eggs in chile, first cook beaten eggs in a frying pan with a little oil. When the eggs are firm, pour some thinned chile sauce into the pan and cook for a minute or two until the eggs take on the chile flavor and the sauce thickens.



**Spicy and saucy stew.**  
Meaty, well-marbled pork ribs are cooked in thick, vinegary adobo sauce.

### **CARNE EN ADOBO**

*(Spicy Meat Stew)*

This stew is best when made from well-marbled cuts of meat, like country-style pork ribs or short ribs of beef. I top the *adobo* with onion slices and serve it with rice and tortillas or bread. *Serves four.*

**2 lb. beef or pork ribs, cut into 2-in. pieces**

**Salt**

**½ head of garlic**

**1 recipe Mexican Red-Chile Sauce, above**

**2 Tbs. vegetable oil**

**1 Tbs. white vinegar**

**½ tsp. dried oregano**

Put the meat in a pot or pressure cooker, cover with water, and add 1½ tsp. salt. Cut the garlic horizontally so that the flesh is exposed and add it to the meat. In a regular pot, bring the meat to a simmer and cook until the meat pulls apart easily, about 1 hour. If you're using a pressure cooker, seal it and pressurize it over high heat; then lower the heat to medium and cook for 35 min.

Make the chile sauce and strain it into a bowl. When the meat is cooked, pour a cup of the meat broth through the same strainer to get more of the chile pulp into the sauce.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over high heat. When the oil is very hot (just before it starts smoking), quickly add the strained chile sauce to it, being careful not to splatter yourself. Fry the sauce over high heat for about 5 min., stirring frequently. Add the meat, 1½ cups of the meat broth, vinegar, and oregano. Lower the heat to medium and continue

cooking, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thick, about 20 min. Season with salt to taste.

### **CLEMOLE**

*(Chicken and Vegetables in Chile Broth)*

Serve *clemole* in big bowls accompanied by a stack of hot tortillas. Put plates of chopped onion, lime wedges, and slices of avocado on the table so that each person can add onion to taste and flavor the broth with a squirt of lime. The best way to eat the corn is to wade right in and eat it with your fingers. *Serves four.*

**3 lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces**

**½ head of garlic**

**1 onion, quartered**

**Salt**

**1 recipe Mexican Red-Chile Sauce, above**

**4 ears of corn, broken into thirds**

**½ lb. green beans, ends trimmed**

**3 zucchini or summer squash, cut into 3-in. pieces**

**½ teaspoon oregano or 2 sprigs epazote**

**TO SERVE:**

**1 onion, chopped**

**1 lime, cut into wedges**

**1 avocado, cut into wedges**

Put the pieces of chicken in a large pot. Add enough water to cover the chicken and also to cover the vegetables that will be added later. Cut the garlic in half horizontally. Add garlic, onion, and 2 tsp. salt. Bring to a boil and then lower the heat. Partially cover and simmer for 10 min., skimming the scum that rises to the surface.

While the chicken cooks, make the red-chile sauce. After the chicken has simmered for 10 min., add the corn, oregano or *epazote*, and ½ tsp. of salt. Strain the sauce right into the pot of chicken and vegetables. Ladle some of the broth into the strainer and press firmly. Simmer 5 min. longer and add the string beans. After another 10 min., add the squash. Cook about 5 min. longer, until the vegetables are tender.

### **SOURCES FOR DRIED RED CHILES**

**The CMC Company**, PO Drawer B, Avalon, NJ 08202; 800/262-2780. Catalog available; checks only.

**Don Alfonso Foods**, PO Box 201988, Austin, TX 78720-1988; 800/456-6100. Catalog available.

**Los Chileros de Nuevo Mexico**, PO Box 6215, Santa Fe, NM 87502; 505/471-6967. Catalog available; checks only.

**Mo Hotta—Mo Betta**, PO Box 4136, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403; 800/462-3200. Catalog available.

**Old Southwest Trading Company**, PO Box 7545, Albuquerque, NM 87194; 505/836-0168. Catalog available.

*Because her mother learned to cook during the Mexican Revolution when there was little but corn and beans to be had, Alejandra Cisneros grew up unfamiliar with much of her region's food. Once married and raising her own family, she set out to rediscover the fine, intricate, and varied dishes that make up Central Mexican cuisine. ♦*



# Creating Caramel

A master pastry chef shows how to make and use this irresistible flavor

BY JOE MCKENNA

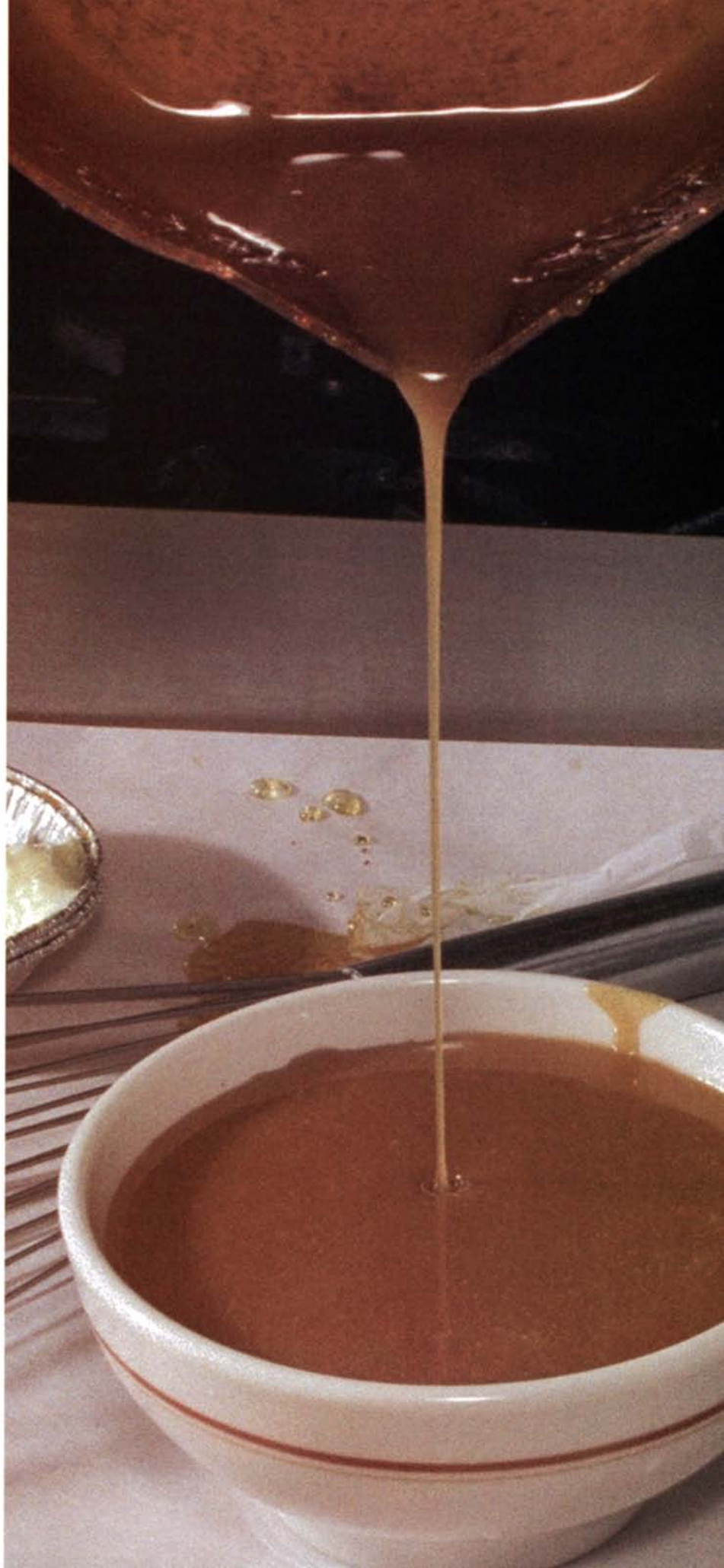
**T**hink about this: I can take a basic kitchen staple with almost no taste of its own, heat it to 320°F, and produce a flavor that many people find irresistible. It's that simple, and that mysterious. I'm talking about caramel. Making caramel is easy, the results are great, and you can use it in many ways.

## USES FOR CARAMEL

Caramel is an uncommonly versatile ingredient. It can be used as a main flavor additive, as a decoration, and as a finish. For example, you can press granulated caramel onto the sides of an iced cake for a crunchy garnish. Caramel flavors many classic desserts, from simple ones like *crème caramel* or bananas Foster to complicated masterpieces such as a *gâteau St.-Honoré* or a Dobos torte. By adding juice or cream to caramel, you can make a sauce to spoon over ice cream or poached fruits, to spread between cake layers, or to flavor a mousse. You can give any ice-cream recipe a totally different flavor by caramelizing three-quarters of the sugar. Brittles are largely caramelized sugar and nuts. You can dip fruits in caramel, which hardens to form a glaze that crackles when you bite into it. And caramel is also used in savory dishes, such as roast duck à l'orange and candied brown potatoes.

Caramel goes well with many other flavors. I especially like it with fruit. The slight acidity of the

*Color is the key to correct flavor. Because caramel sauce is used as the main flavoring of desserts such as mousses and soufflés or by itself as a delicious topping, it's especially important to get the taste just right. The color of the sauce at right indicates that it will have a rich, fully developed flavor with no burnt taste.*



fruits and the sweetness of the caramel complement one another. Other great combinations include caramel with cinnamon, nutmeg, nuts, or rum. Dark rum is very compatible, and my favorite when adding a spirit. Chocolate and caramel are good together, though the pairing sometimes comes off a little too sweet for my taste. When marrying other tastes with caramel, I prefer to keep the blend simple, because caramel itself is an elemental, though resonant, flavor. To mask it with too many other flavors doesn't make good cooking sense.

I'm going to explain the process of caramelizing sugar. Then I'll describe how to make a caramel mousse, a soft nougat that can be molded into dessert cups to hold the mousse, and a luscious caramel sauce to finish it off. Throughout, the sugar I'll refer to is white, granulated cane or beet sugar.

### GETTING THE FLAVOR RIGHT

Probably the most crucial part of making caramel is getting the sugar to the right stage. Stop the cooking too soon and the flavor doesn't have a chance to develop. Take it off too late and it's burnt. Once caramelization starts, it develops very quickly—the syrup can go from colorless to burnt in under a minute. Within this kind of time frame, another six or eight seconds can make a big difference.

To complicate matters further, simply taking the caramel off the stove doesn't stop the process. Residual heat in the pan and in the caramel itself continues the cooking, what I call carryover cooking. The greater the amount of caramel I'm making, the more carryover cooking there will be. To compensate for this, I'll stop a large batch a couple of shades shy of where I want it. Plunging the bottom of the pan into a metal bowl of ice water will take the heat out of the pan but not the caramel. For a small amount, this icy bath will pretty much curtail further cook-

#### **Caramel-dipped fruits are easy to make.**

*Following the wet method, cook sugar just until it has the barest hint of color. Then dip clean, perfectly dry fruits and let them set up on a cool surface.*



Photos except where noted: Ruth Livy



**Adding liquid ingredients or butter stops the process of caramelization.** *Because of the intense heat of the caramel, liquids also start to evaporate immediately. When adding alcohol, like the orange liqueur going into the sauce (shown above), it's especially important to avoid the fumes, which can burn your eyes and nose.*

ing. Adding liquid ingredients will also stop the flavor from developing any further.

How dark is too dark? That depends in part on your taste and in part on how you're going to use the caramel. If the caramel flavor has to carry the dish, it should be rich and pronounced, but not so dark that it starts to pick up a bitter, almost burnt taste. I think it's especially critical for the flavor to be just right when making a caramel sauce, which can be used either as a delicious topping or as a major flavoring ingredient (as in the mousse recipe on p. 39). When there are other ingredients to mellow the caramel flavor—for example, if I'm going to grind up the caramel and put it into ice cream, or if I'm adding nuts to make a brittle—I can get away with having the caramel a little on the dark side.

If the inside of your saucepan is dark, or if you're cooking a lot of caramel, the degree of caramelization can be difficult to distinguish. A simple way of monitoring the caramel is to test it against a piece of white paper (I use kitchen parchment). I tear the paper in half, lay one piece next to the stove, and tear the other into five strips, which I then twist into tight spirals. Once I detect color in the syrup, I dip a paper twist into the pot and dab a little syrup onto the paper. As the color deepens, I repeat with another twist. It's easy to "read" the caramel stage against the white paper (see photo at right).

### HOW TO MAKE CARAMEL

Although sugar *dissolves* in liquids even at low temperatures, it doesn't actually begin to *melt* until it's heated to 320°. At that point it also starts to pick up caramel flavors and colors. There are two ways I cook sugar to make caramel: a wet method and a dry method.



**The wet method**—To cook sugar using the wet method, I combine it with about one-third of its weight in water (say, two cups of sugar to two-thirds of a cup of water). Then I bring the mixture to a boil while stirring gently over high heat.

During cooking, I repeatedly wash down the insides of the saucepan with a clean pastry brush that has been moistened with cold water (preferably one that hasn't been used with oil). This is a very important step. If crystals of sugar are allowed to form on the inside of the saucepan, the entire mixture may crystallize (for an explanation, see "Crystallization and how to control it" on p. 39).

Once the mixture boils, I stop stirring and add corn syrup. The exact amount will vary depending on the recipe. I continue boiling the syrup until it reaches the desired stage of caramelization.

**The dry method**—With this method, I combine the sugar with lemon juice. One tablespoon of lemon juice per pound of sugar is usually sufficient. The acid in lemon juice helps the sugar caramelize at a more even rate and discourages crystals from forming. I rub the sugar and lemon juice together very well between my hands to ensure that the juice is evenly distributed. Then I cook the sugar, stirring continually with a wooden spoon, until it caramelizes. It isn't necessary to wash the sides of the pan when using this method.

You can caramelize sugar completely dry (no water, no lemon juice) simply by letting it sit in a heavy pan over heat without stirring. I don't like to do this, though, because the caramel cooks unevenly and tends to have lots of dark flecks in it.

Either of the methods described above gives good results when I need a simple caramel to use as a flavoring base. The dry method yields a slightly cloudy caramel, which is fine if I'm making an opaque sauce that contains cream. Generally I prefer to use the wet method because of the clarity of the caramel it produces. For any type of decoration where the caramel should be perfectly transparent, such as dipped fruits (see photo at left), the wet method is the better choice.

#### TAKING PRECAUTIONS

Because sugar has reached an incredibly high temperature by the time it caramelizes, it can burn you badly if you touch it. Accidents happen when people don't focus on what they're doing. The most important safeguard you can take is to have all equipment and measured ingredients within arm's reach before you actually turn on the heat. Also, don't try to do other things at the same time that will distract your attention.

Take care when adding liquid to caramel (see photo above left). As soon as you do, the liquid boils and begins to evaporate in the intense heat. You'll

*To halt the cooking of a small batch, plunge the pot into a bowl of ice water.*

get a little bit less of that violent sputtering and reduce the chance of getting burned if you heat the liquids before you add them. Bring milk or cream to scalding, and juice to lukewarm. (Warming the liquid is a good idea for another reason. Cold liquid can turn the caramel to a solid. It will eventually melt again, but this slows you down.) It's interesting that, off the heat, if you pour liquid straight into caramel without disturbing it, it won't do anything. As soon as you stir it, however, it will start to sputter. Avoid hovering over the pan when adding alcohol. The fumes can really burn your nostrils and eyes.

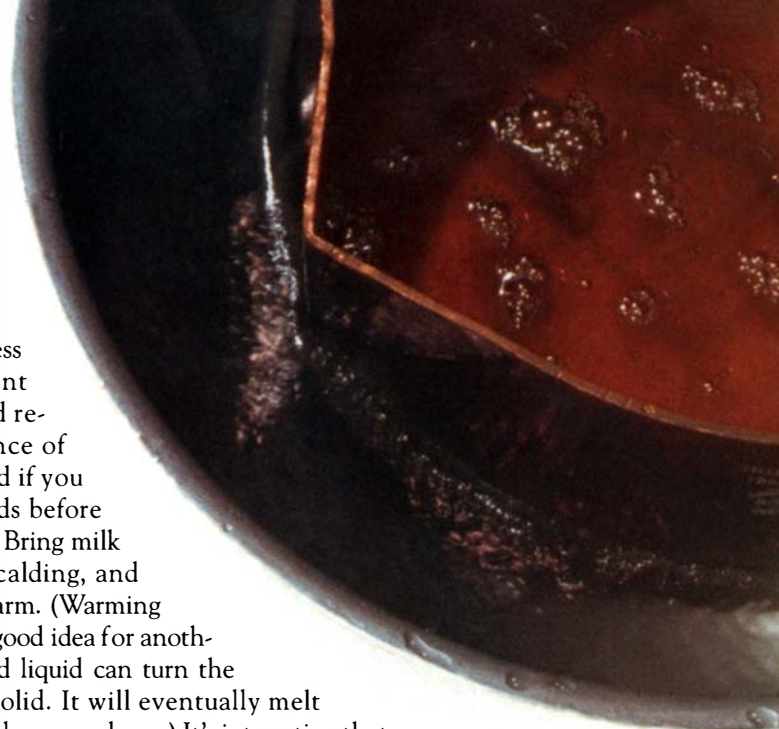
#### EQUIPMENT TO USE

Any type of heavy-bottom saucepan will work for cooking sugar. Copper is best because of its superb heat conductivity, followed by aluminum, and finally stainless steel. A candy thermometer allows you to accurately monitor the temperature of the caramel as it cooks.

Some recipes call for spreading caramel out thin or flattening it with a rolling pin. For working caramel on a surface, marble or granite is preferred for two reasons. The cool stone helps stop the cooking, and the caramel is less liable to stick to it. Wood and synthetic materials aren't so great, because they retain heat; also, caramel can stick to wood. If you don't have a stone surface, a stainless-steel sheet pan works well. Whatever surface you use, be sure to oil or butter it to prevent sticking. Pouring caramel onto a sheet of oiled parchment instead of directly onto the work surface makes cleanup easy.

When caramel cools, it forms a hard glaze on anything it touches, so when I start to cook it, I put a large pot half full of water on the stove. Afterwards, I simply immerse both pan and utensils in the hot water. They literally clean themselves. You could also just fill the pan you've cooked the caramel in with hot water and put it on the stove.

*Monitor progress by sampling color. Once caramelization begins, it takes less than a minute to go from colorless (and flavorless) to the dark mahogany of the caramel shown in the pan above. The author checks color by using paper twists to dab syrup onto white paper.*







*For a caramel extravaganza, fill almond nougat cups with caramel mousse and drizzle with caramel sauce. All three recipes can be made ahead and stored.*

## STORING CARAMEL

Sugar is hygroscopic, meaning it attracts and retains moisture. The greater the percentage of sugar in the final caramel product, the more susceptible to humidity it will be. For example, the glaze on dipped fruits may start to deteriorate within half an hour because it's in contact with moisture. You can keep things like nut brittles or nougat cups fresh by storing them in airtight containers. Caramel sauce will keep well in the refrigerator for months.

## ALMOND NOUGAT CUPS

For a spectacular dessert, you can fill these cups with caramel mousse topped with caramel sauce (recipes given below). Or fill the cups with any flavor ice cream or sorbet. You can also enjoy them on their own as a type of crunchy cookie, either left flat or rolled around a wooden spoon handle. *Makes 12 dessert cups.*

**4 oz. (1¼ cup) sliced, blanched almonds**  
**4 oz. (½ cup) corn syrup**  
**4 oz. (½ cup) sugar**  
**4 oz. unsalted butter**

Heat oven to 350°F. Lightly crush the almonds. Prepare a baking tray by lightly coating it with vegetable oil.

Combine the corn syrup and sugar in a 1-qt. saucepan and set over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Stir in the almonds, and then the whole piece of butter. Continue cooking until the butter is absorbed and all the ingredients come into one homogeneous mass. Remove from heat.

For each portion, put 1 Tbs. of the mixture onto the prepared tray and press into a thin round using the back of a soup spoon. Be sure to spread the mixture thin. Bake until nicely golden brown, 8 to 10 min. Turn the pan halfway through cooking so the wafers brown evenly. Cool slightly, and then remove them from baking tray and quickly shape them on the back of a custard cup or small dish.

Once shaped, the almond nougat cups should be kept dry in a sealed container so they remain crisp.

## CARAMEL SAUCE

To vary the flavor, use a different juice in place of the orange juice, such as cherry, apple, or pineapple, or substitute another liqueur. For a creamier consistency, bring two ounces of heavy cream to a boil and blend into the finished sauce. *Makes 1¾ cups.*

**2 cups (1 lb.) sugar**  
**¾ cup (5 oz.) water**  
**1 Tbs. corn syrup**  
**4 oz. unsalted butter, cut into 8 pieces**  
**½ cup fresh orange juice (juice of 2 medium oranges)**  
**1 to 2 Tbs. orange liqueur (optional)**

Combine the sugar and water in a saucepan. Gently stir until the mixture comes to a boil. Periodically during cooking, be sure to wash the sides of the saucepan with a clean pastry brush dipped in water.

Once the mixture boils, stop stirring. Add the corn syrup and continue cooking over moderate to high heat until the mixture becomes a medium caramel color. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the butter piece by piece. Stir in the orange juice and liqueur.

Allow to cool, then transfer to a clean container, cover, and refrigerate until needed.

Photo: Robert Masala



## CARAMEL MOUSSE

Be sure the caramel sauce you use in this mousse has a deep, rich, fully developed flavor. For a different flavor, you can use honey or maple syrup in place of the caramel sauce. This mousse can also be frozen. Simply defrost it overnight in the refrigerator and use as needed. *Serves four.*

4 egg yolks  
3 Tbs. sugar  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cooled caramel sauce (see recipe above)  
2 tsp. gelatin powder  
3 Tbs. orange juice (juice of 1 medium orange)  
3 egg whites (or  $3\frac{3}{4}$  oz. pasteurized egg whites)  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups heavy cream

Whip together the yolks, 2 Tbs. sugar, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup caramel sauce, or more to taste, over hot but not boiling water until hot and thick, about 10 min. The mixture should leave a thin ribbon trail when you raise the whisk. (To cook the yolks properly, the mixture should reach at least 165°F.) Remove from heat and continue beating until lukewarm.

Combine the orange juice and the gelatin in a small stainless-steel bowl. Let the mixture stand for 5 min. and then melt over hot water, bringing the mixture to about 100°. Let cool slightly.

Prepare a meringue by combining the egg whites and 1 Tbs. sugar and whipping this mixture to medium-stiff peaks—until peaks fall over just slightly. Whip the cream to medium stiff.

To assemble the mousse, fold the slightly warm gelatin mixture into the egg-yolk mixture, then fold in the meringue, and finally fold in the whipped cream. Refrigerate at least 2 hours.

## MACADAMIA NUT BRITTLE

The addition of baking soda gives brittles their light, airy texture. If you're using salted macadamia nuts, rinse them under running water, drain, and then dry them completely in a low oven. You can substitute chopped, blanched almonds for the macadamia nuts.

1 cup chopped macadamia nuts (or  $1\frac{1}{4}$  cups whole nuts)  
1 cup (8 oz.) sugar  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (4 oz.) water  
5 Tbs. (3 oz.) corn syrup  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. vanilla extract  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. baking soda  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. butter

If the nuts are whole, chop them medium coarse. Lightly oil an 18-in. sheet of kitchen parchment or a baking sheet. In a 1-qt. saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil. Add the corn syrup and cook without stirring until the mixture comes to 245°F on a candy thermometer. Stir in the nuts and cook the mixture until it reaches 311°.

Remove from the heat, quickly combine the vanilla and baking soda, and stir into nut mixture. Add the butter and stir until well blended and foamy. Spread out onto the parchment or baking sheet about  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. thick. Let cool a little, and then cut or break into random-size pieces. Store in an airtight container.

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Joe McKenna is a Certified Master Pastry Chef on the faculty of the Culinary Institute of America, in Hyde Park, New York. He has participated three times in international culinary competitions in Frankfurt, Germany. For the most recent one, he made a chocolate saxophone that was later given to President Clinton, who, it turns out, is allergic to chocolate. ♦



## Crystallization and how to control it

Sugar made from sugarcane or sugar beets is sucrose, a complex sugar made of two simple sugars, glucose and fructose. When sucrose is dissolved in water and boiled, the liquid content in the saucepan begins to diminish due to evaporation. As this occurs, a syrupy film forms on the sides of the pan. Left alone, this film will dry and form into crystals. If these crystals fall back into the rest of the syrup, the whole mixture is liable to crystallize. Once crystallization begins, it starts a chain reaction between the sugar molecules, which become attracted to one another and clump together, forming larger crystals. When this occurs, the syrup is said to have “fallen out of solution” or to have “precipitated.”

One way to prevent crystallization is to wash down the pan sides continually with a clean brush dipped in water. Another is to add ingredients that help control crystallization. Acid, such as lemon juice or cream of tartar, or a simple sugar like corn syrup (glucose) or honey (fructose) will retard crystallization. The addition of an acid *inverts* the syrup: it breaks the sucrose down into its two components—glucose and fructose. These simple sugars obstruct the sucrose molecules' ability to lock onto one another and begin the crystallization process. Increasing the percentage of glucose or fructose by adding corn syrup or honey achieves similar results.

Sometimes having sugar crystallize is desirable. Fondant icing and fudge, for example, both rely on crystallization to give them their very fine structure and shine.—J.McK.

*To prevent the syrup from crystallizing when cooking caramel by the wet method, author Joe McKenna washes down the sides of the pan with a clean pastry brush dipped in cold water.*

# Tools for Puréeing

Knowing the task is key to selecting the right implement

BY PRISCILLA MARTEL



*The oldest puréeing tool, the mortar and pestle, has been used since antiquity for grinding and mashing. Look for a deep-bowled mortar and a heavy pestle, which will lessen the muscle needed to do the job. The author's mortar and pestle (shown here) came from Greece.*

*The immersion or hand blender is the newest kid on the block. It's great for puréeing soup or mashing potatoes right in the pot.*



Puréeing is a technique used for making all manner of delicious things, from airy fish quenelles to vegetable side dishes (like the sweet-potato and turnip purée we have every Thanksgiving) to raspberry sauce. Purées form the bases of sauces, soufflés, and many soups as well. Most creamy soups rely on puréeing to produce a uniform texture. Some soups have an entirely different character depending on which puréeing tool is used. An Italian soup made of wild mushrooms, pancetta, potatoes, and beans is rough and hearty when I spin the cooked mushrooms briefly in a food processor, but silken and delicate when passed through a fine sieve.

Whether I need to mash a potato or purée salmon for a mousse, I know I can lay my hands on the perfect tool. As a former restaurant owner and chef, I've had ample opportunity to use all of the possible implements for making a purée, and while certain tasks require specialized items, most need only the basic equipment I have in my kitchen at home.

Automation has conquered the kitchen as it has everything else. For the majority of puréeing jobs, the food processor is the easiest and fastest tool to use. But each of the other tools has its special use. For very small quantities, I prefer my mortar and pestle. To get the smoothest, most silken results, I'll use a drum sieve. To strain a sauce and purée the vegetables used to flavor it, a perforated conical sieve is ideal. When I want to purée and strain out skins or seeds in one process, I opt for the food mill. And when I want to purée soup or vegetables right in the cooking pot, I reach for my immersion blender.

## THE MOST BASIC TOOLS

I learned the hard way that a waxy new potato is better when mashed manually. The new potatoes I put through a food processor turned to Silly Putty. I urge everyone to try mashing an unskinned, boiled red potato with a plain old *fork*. The potato mashes



easily, and the flecks of red skin give an interesting texture to the dish. But one or two potatoes at a time is about the limit.

A *wire masher* produces a smooth purée every time, no matter what kind of potato I'm using, albeit with a little effort. And it's the most convenient tool of all for chunky purées of soft, moist ingredients that practically fall apart anyway, like apples or winter squash.

## MORTAR AND PESTLE

In my book, everyone should have a mortar and pestle. They're invaluable for mashing small quantities of garlic, anchovies, capers, and herbs—pungent foods I like to keep away from my cutting board. The weight and shape of the mortar and pestle are the keys to its effectiveness. Mine is marble. The mortar is ten inches high with a narrow, six-inch-deep bowl that keeps the ingredients contained. The pestle weighs two pounds—perfect for crushing with minimum effort. I like the control I have when using my mortar and pestle, and it's easy to clean.

## SIEVES

A *drum sieve*—also called a *tamis*—is made of a piece of mesh stretched taut over a circular wooden frame. The drum sieve sits conveniently over most containers and bowls. Since the sieve surface is flat and also larger than that of a typical household sieve, a *tamis* is infinitely more efficient—both faster and easier—to use. To force food through its mesh, I use a hard, plastic scraper.

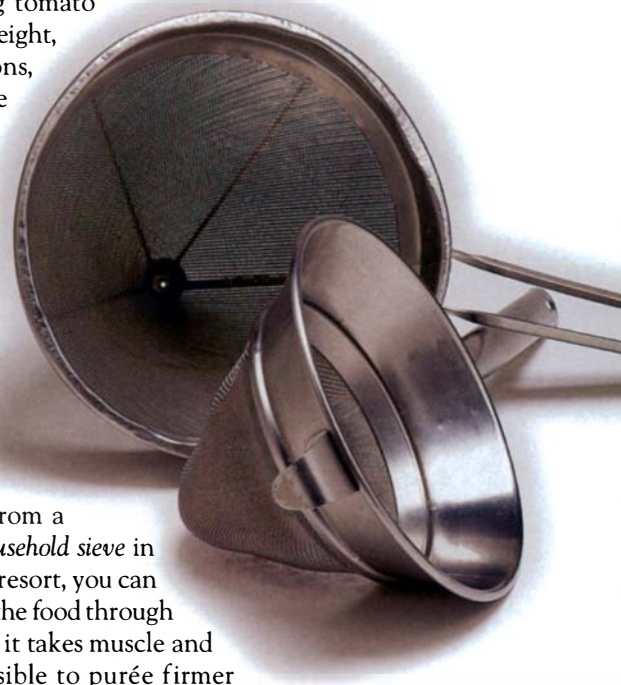
Drum sieves can be difficult to find. My set of four came from a Chinese market and cost about \$2 each. For making fine purées of small quantities of soft-cooked apples, squash, tomatoes, turnips, and other watery foods, this is an easy tool to use. I frequently use mine to remove lumps in custards. In addition, you can purée firmer foods (such as chopped meat for pâtés) in a drum sieve. This takes patience, but the results are velvety smooth.



*Drum sieves, or tamis, can be hard to find, but they make the finest-textured purées. They're made to sit flat over a bowl. The cook works the food through with a plastic scraper.*

There are two types of *conical sieves* that I find useful in making purées. One is made from a solid sheet of perforated steel and comes with its own wooden pestle. After braising lamb shanks or a pot roast, I'll strain the cooking liquid through this sieve and then push the soft carrots, celery, and onions through to thicken and flavor my sauce. This sieve is also good for making tomato purée and applesauce. Lightweight, inexpensive aluminum versions, complete with wooden pestle and wire stand, are sold in hardware stores along with canning supplies.

The other type of conical sieve has a fine, dense wire mesh. I use this sieve most frequently to refine a purée made with a machine, working the food through with a two-ounce kitchen ladle. It's especially good for removing fibers and seeds from a fruit purée. You can use a *household sieve* in much the same way. As a last resort, you can even make a purée by forcing the food through a conical or regular sieve, but it takes muscle and time, and it's almost impossible to purée firmer cooked foods, such as mushrooms or meat.



*Two conical sieves—the fine mesh of the smaller sieve, foreground, removes all traces of fiber from soft foods. A small kitchen ladle makes a good tamper. The perforated steel sieve, background, requires a wooden pestle for pushing food through its basket.*

## RICERS AND FOOD MILLS

Slightly more automated than the drum sieve are ricers and food mills, which force cooked foods through perforated metal. The *ricer* is limited because it accepts only small quantities of food at a time; it's best for cooked tubers and root vegetables. Ricers produce perfectly smooth mashed potatoes with little effort.

The food mill, on the other hand, is one of the most versatile of tools. It will purée anything a food



**Ricers and food mills** require less muscle-power than sieves. Food mills are versatile and can purée nearly everything except firm meats. The best ones have interchangeable plates for coarse to fine purées.

**Food processors** do all the work of puréeing with little effort on the part of the cook. Usually the biggest job is cleaning up.



processor will, at the cost of a bit more effort, and it's especially useful for any food with parts you want to segregate, like skin, seeds, or fibers. I always use one to crush tomatoes and remove their skins before freezing or canning.

The food mill also gives more control over a purée than does a machine. The only problem I've found is cleanup: the several parts include a plate with holes that clog easily.

Better food mills offer interchangeable plates with holes of varying sizes to make coarse or smooth purées. I use a Mouli. I've found that cheaper mills are more trouble than they're worth. In inexpensive models, the paddle that pushes the food through the metal plate often buckles or refuses to stay in place.

## THE MACHINE AGE

My full-size food processor can purée just about anything. It's the only piece of equipment in my kitchen that will turn nuts into a creamy spread or transform tough-skinned olives into a smooth paste for tapenade. Its powerful motor can also make fine purées from boneless meat, poultry, and fish; however, friction caused by the action of the blade heats the meat slightly, which can toughen it.

You can pulse a food processor to make coarse purées. By turning the machine on and off for a few seconds, you can get a coarse tomato purée or a chunky fruit sauce.

A food processor doesn't work for tiny quantities: you need enough food in the bowl to reach the blades. Even in a mini food processor, a few cloves of garlic bounce around and never get puréed until you add a bit of olive oil.

My standard two-quart blender produces an exceptionally smooth

**Blenders** are great for puréeing fairly liquid foods. Some models have a removable base, making cleanup easier.



Photos: Susan Kahn

purée, provided that the consistency of the food is fairly liquid, such as soup or soft fruit.

Dry foods—chickpeas, for instance—will stick to the sides of the bowl and won't come into contact with the blade.

To purée a large quantity of soup, I use my immersion blender, plunging it right into the pot. The immersion blender has a small motor encased in a heavy plastic handle. A blade at the base of a narrow wand does the work. The model I use, a Braun, is about twelve inches long, weighs about a pound and has a single blade. It's almost as powerful as the best traditional blender with the bonus of portability, and it's easy to clean. I simply douse the wand and blade in soapy water and rinse.

## WHERE TO FIND THE TOOLS

*Most of the items described are sold locally at hardware, department, cookware, and restaurant-supply stores. They're also available by mail from the following companies:*

**Bridge Kitchenware**, 214 East 52nd St., New York, NY 10022; 800/274-3435, stocks all the items discussed, although its catalog (\$3, refundable with purchase) only lists a few. Call for information.

**Broadway Panhandler**, 520 Broadway, New York, NY 10012; 212/966-3434, has most of the tools mentioned. No catalog. Call for information.

**Sur La Table**, 84 Pine St., Pike Place Farmers' Market, Seattle, WA 98101; 800/243-0852, carries most of the items, including the drum sieves, although not all appear in its free catalog. Call for information.

**Williams-Sonoma** stores stock most of the items and will ship. Call 800/541-1262 for the store nearest you.

*Priscilla Martel was chef and manager of the award-winning Restaurant du Village in Chester, Connecticut, for twelve years. She is now a restaurant consultant and is writing a book about Mediterranean sweets. ♦*



# A Creole Menu

Designing recipes and courses  
around contrasting flavors, textures,  
and cooking methods

BY TI MARTIN

When you're running a restaurant, management and administration can take you away from the real work you love. What I love is everything about cooking—most especially planning menus. I relish the times when I can plan a dinner party for discerning clients.

Designing a successful menu means more than just picking out delicious recipes. You need to think about how those dishes will work together. The pace of the meal should be considered, too—you don't want to overwhelm your guests with too much of a good thing. And what goes on in the kitchen is as important as what happens in the dining room. Your menu has to be realistic, so that you can have time to enjoy your own party!

Recently I sat down with Dick Brennan, Jr. ("Dickie"), my cousin, partner, and chef of our restaurant, to plan a menu—"dinner for eight prepared in your home"—that was to be our donation to a charity auction. We considered choice of recipe ingredients, progression of the meal, and last but hardly least, we thought about how to pull the whole thing off without a hitch. "Contrast" was the key for our plan, and we designed contrasts into all levels of our menu to ensure a delicious, well-paced meal that's a pleasure for guests and cook alike.

## STRIVE FOR CONTRAST IN TEXTURE AND FLAVOR

Ideally, both within dishes and among them, texture and flavor are varied. You wouldn't want chicken mousse with mashed potatoes and puréed peas, because they're all mild in taste and soft in texture. That's pretty clear.

Contrasts within dishes may be less obvious but are equally important. We often use a garnish for contrast, such as crunchy, flavorful toasted pecans

### MENU

Grilled-Mushroom Salad  
with Garlic Vinaigrette



Sauté of Louisiana Crawfish

Popcorn-Rice and Crawfish  
Boudin Cakes

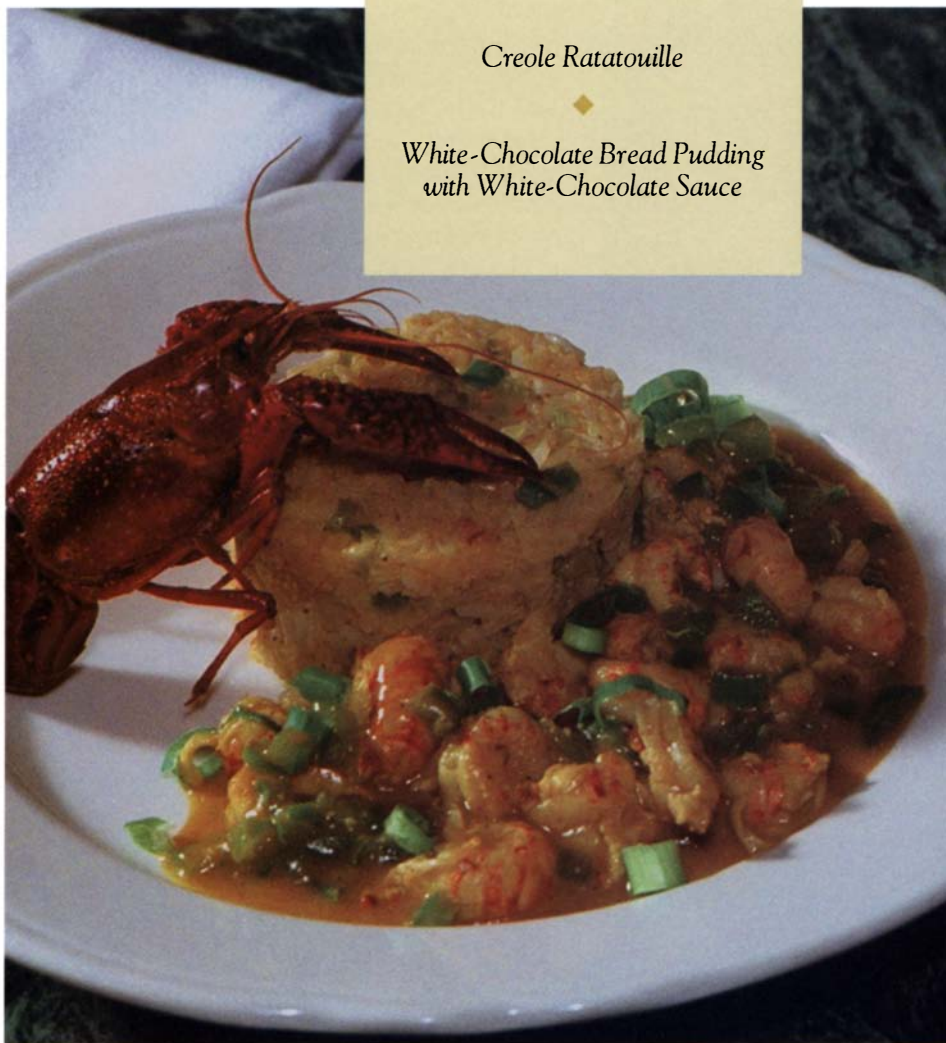


Roasted Chicken with Honey  
Red-Pepper Sauce

Creole Ratatouille



White-Chocolate Bread Pudding  
with White-Chocolate Sauce



*Sauté of Crawfish with Popcorn-Rice and Crawfish Boudin Cakes—Crawfish are in season from early spring through mid-summer in Louisiana. Seasonal local specialties are a sound base for any menu.*

on top of soft and delicate trout. Other times, we might find a sauce does the trick, like piquant Parmesan cheese sauce over somewhat dry and bland veal. Even very plainly cooked dishes, at their best, have contrasts. Take a grilled steak, for instance. The dry, crusty exterior complements the juicy, chewy inside. The idea is to keep the mouth interested and happy rather than letting it get bored.

For our menu, we wanted roasted chicken as the main course. Nothing pleases a greater number of people than a good chicken roasted to a golden brown, and our Creole Seasoning Mix (recipe at right) gives this version a crusty, deliciously flavored skin. The contrast of crisp, slightly spicy skin with the juicy, mild meat makes a sometimes homely dish sublime (recipe on p. 47).

To set off the chicken, we chose a simple red-pepper and honey sauce. It's just a touch sweet, a nice contrast to chicken. While the sauce is meant to have a sweet character, we don't want it to be cloying. Ingredients that contrast with the honey—like the red-wine vinegar and the Worcestershire sauce—will prevent this and give the sauce complexity: it tastes sweet, sharp, salty, and mellow all at once.

Our Creole ratatouille rounded out the plan for the main course (see the recipe on p. 47). Since the chicken sauce is based on red peppers, Dickie planned to omit them from our usual ratatouille recipe. You can always adjust recipes a bit so that they'll complement rather than repeat one another.

In the ratatouille, the contrast is one of flavor and color. Our recipe is especially easy to make. You just simmer all the ingredients together until the vegetables are tender. We use tomatoes, eggplant, onion, green pepper, seasonings, and chicken stock.

Before the chicken, we'd serve crawfish. No one

can get enough of them during the season, and so Dickie came up with a double-crawfish special—rice-and-crawfish boudin cakes surrounded by a crawfish sauté (see the recipes on p. 46). He would lace the creamy boudin cakes with a few just slightly chewy shellfish and serve them with more craw-

fish in a silky, spicy butter sauce. This dish is very rich, and could risk being excessively so, but the piquancy from the fresh scallions and the Creole Seasoning cuts and balances the butter sauce, creating a dish to keep the mouth very happy.

We liked the way the menu was shaping up—creamy boudin, spicy shellfish, and the entirely different taste and bite of vegetables and tender chicken. To begin the meal, we added more contrasting textures and flavors: a crisp green salad topped with grilled or broiled shiitake mushrooms, which feel and taste almost meaty, and a basic vinaigrette sharpened with a crushed clove of garlic (recipe on p. 46).

The variety of texture and taste within the salad is important, but this dish also provides a needed contrast to the rest of the menu. The crawfish sauté with rice cakes, the chicken dish, and the ratatouille all contain bright flavors and colors—paprika, cayenne, red and green peppers, scarlet crawfish. The salad, with its deep brown, grilled shiitakes and mix of fresh greens adds an earthy quality, even a rawness, to the overall character of the menu. This rustic dish also makes the crawfish sauté seem all the more elegant and luxurious—again through contrast.

Dessert was easy. We wanted something sweet and mellow after the vivid and spicy flavors of the meal. White-chocolate bread pudding was the answer (recipe on p. 47). Not only is it the most popular item on our restaurant menu, but it offers more textural contrasts. The browned top is chewy or crispy, depending on whether the



*Ti Martin selects the freshest ingredients for her recipes. She enjoys designing menus for her New Orleans clients, who she thinks have mastered the art of hosting lavish—but never overdone—dinner parties.*

## Seasoning mixes

*Seasoning is in cookery what chords are in music.*

—Louis Eustache Ude

The importance of seasoning is something New Orleans cooks know innately. Well over thirty years ago, as my mother (Ella Brennan) and uncle (Dickie's father, Dick Brennan) strove for consistency in their first restaurant's most popular dishes, their chefs tried making small batches of seasoning mixes. The goal was to deliver the same flavor to the customer no matter who was cooking. The seasoning mixes have evolved into a few basic recipes, and these vary slightly from one Brennan restaurant to another. As chefs from our kitchens move on, the idea spreads, and now perhaps half the restaurants in New Orleans use their own combination of herbs and spices. Here's an all-purpose version that works well in almost anything. We even use it in mashed potatoes.—T.M.

### CREOLE SEASONING MIX

Makes ½ cup.

4 tsp. salt  
4 tsp. paprika  
1 Tbs. granulated or powdered garlic  
1 Tbs. black pepper  
2¼ tsp. granulated or powdered onion  
1½ tsp. thyme  
1½ tsp. oregano  
1½ tsp. cayenne pepper

Combine all ingredients and store in an airtight container.



dessert is served cold (as we intended to do) or hot. Either way, it contrasts with the smooth white-chocolate custard underneath.

### CONSIDER THE PACING OF THE COURSES

The classic French menu moves from light to fuller flavors—say from sole to chicken to lamb to chocolate. Sort of like Ravel's Bolero, the meal builds to a crescendo. In New Orleans, we certainly have a strong French tradition, and we keep the classic pattern in mind. However, New Orleanians are fond of highly seasoned food that's less subtle than most French dishes. We like a lot of flavor in every course, as you can tell. Our menu is built on a different

have the right mix of cooking methods, otherwise pulling off your carefully crafted menu will be too hair-raising. While you don't want to have too much made ahead (because your menu will seem "pre-fab" and lacking in excitement), you should have a few items totally finished and the rest prepped and ready to cook and assemble.

For our dinner, the greens could be washed and dried hours ahead and kept in a bowl in the refrigerator lightly covered with a damp paper towel. The vinaigrette could be made way ahead of time, too. The boudin cakes were another good "do-ahead" dish since the mixture can be made and the cakes shaped and arranged on buttered trays ahead, ready to reheat before bringing to the table.

Peeling crawfish can be tedious, although once you get the hang of it, you'll cut down the time. (For more on cooking and peeling crawfish, see Basics, p. 72.) If fresh crawfish aren't available—or if you want to save time—cooked, cleaned, and frozen tails are a great substitute. For the sauté, the crawfish can be cooked and peeled and the other ingredients chopped and measured ahead of time. The final assembly will only take about two minutes. If the chickens were all set to go, they could roast unattended while the first courses were being served. The Creole ratatouille could be made days before the meal.

By contrasting our cooking methods, we'll avoid congestion in the kitchen and delay at the dinner table. For this menu, we broil, roast, simmer, and sauté.

We'd broil the mushrooms; then turn the oven down, put the chickens in, and serve the salad. While clearing the first course, we could slip the boudin cakes into the oven along with the chickens. They should be warm by the time the sauté is done. For the main course, we'd heat the ratatouille on top of the stove while carving the chickens. Dickie would cook the white-chocolate pudding one day before the dinner and just cut it up and sauce it when ready to serve.

We knew the menu would be fun to do, but admittedly it's not the quickest in the world, and it's on the lavish side. If you prefer something simpler, you might eliminate the second or third course. If I skipped the chicken, I might serve the crawfish



*Roasted Chicken with Honey Red-Pepper Sauce is an elegant, but light, main course. Contrasting rich and light dishes is key to keeping your menu exciting and well-paced.*

structure, in which the sequence of dishes is not a gradual progression, but instead sets a pace that alternates light and rich dishes.

We start with a simple salad to whet the guests' appetites. I think greens with a vinaigrette dressing always make you feel hungrier rather than full. And mushrooms don't fill you up any more than the lettuce. The crawfish course with its butter sauce is rich. Then comes another light course—chicken and vegetables—followed by a pull-out-all-the-stops dessert with plenty of white chocolate and cream. Light to rich to light to rich. Just like the contrasting flavors and textures, this rhythmic progression keeps your palate awake.

### REMEMBER TO BE PRACTICAL

Dickie had been thinking about the cooking plan all along as we developed the menu. It's critical to



*Orchestrating a menu is easy with dishes that require little last-minute attention, such as the crawfish sauté. Brennan arranges the sauté with a boudin cake and a scarlet crawfish for color.*



first and then the salad to avoid two rich courses in a row. And if the crawfish were omitted, I'd add a carbohydrate to the chicken course, perhaps crisp potato pancakes.

### GRILLED-MUSHROOM SALAD WITH GARLIC VINAIGRETTE

Almost any kind of mushroom can be substituted for the shiitake in this salad, and the greens can be varied, too. Try Belgian endive, romaine, or mixed baby greens. A light wine, such as a sauvignon blanc, will not clash with the vinaigrette. *Serves eight.*

#### FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

4 tsp. red-wine vinegar  
¼ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. pepper  
1 clove garlic  
½ cup olive oil

#### FOR THE SALAD:

2 heads radicchio  
2 heads frisée  
24 medium shiitake mushrooms  
3 Tbs. olive oil  
½ tsp. salt  
¼ tsp. pepper

**To make the vinaigrette**—Whisk the vinegar, salt, and pepper together. Crush the garlic and add, and then slowly whisk in the oil.

**To make the salad**—Tear the greens into pieces, wash, and dry. Cut off the mushroom stems so that they're even with the caps. Toss the caps with 1 Tbs. oil and half the salt and pepper. Grill or broil until tender, about 2 min. a side. Remove from the heat and toss with remaining oil, salt, and pepper. Toss the greens with the vinaigrette, set the mushrooms on top, and pour over the salad any mushroom juices that have accumulated.

### SAUTÉ OF LOUISIANA CRAWFISH

You can buy crawfish live or already cooked and shelled. Most people use the cooked tails. They're so much easier to cook with and don't usually cost more despite the labor. If you do want to try the whole ones, figure you'll get a half pound of cooked, shelled tails from every pound of live crawfish. See Basics, p. 72, for cooking and peeling tips. For mail-order sources of crawfish, see above. Shrimp work beautifully for this recipe, too. The sauté is a great party dish since it all goes together in about two minutes. We like to serve it with a full-flavored chardonnay that stands up to the seasoning in this dish. *Serves eight.*

12 oz. butter, softened  
6 scallions, chopped (including the tops)  
2 small green peppers, diced fine  
2 lb. cooked, shelled crawfish tails  
2 to 3 Tbs. Creole Seasoning Mix, p. 44  
2 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce

In a frying pan, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter and sauté the scallions, peppers, and crawfish tails with the Creole Seasoning Mix and Worcestershire sauce until warm, about 2 min. Remove from heat. Add the remaining butter about 1 Tbs. at a time, shaking the pan and stirring so that the butter softens and makes a creamy sauce but doesn't melt completely. Serve immediately.

### POPCORN-RICE AND CRAWFISH BOUDIN CAKES

Popcorn rice is available at most supermarkets now, but if you can't find it, any aromatic rice, such as basmati, will work fine. Since we always have lots of crawfish shells around at the restaurant, we use them for stock and put it in this dish. If you have shells, by all means make a stock by cooking them along with a bit of onion, celery, and garlic in enough water to cover them all. Otherwise, regular fish stock will do nicely, or even chicken stock. You can make these luscious cakes hours ahead of time and reheat them. They taste something like a Creole risotto. Try these with shrimp, too. *Makes eight cakes.*

4 Tbs. butter  
2 ribs celery, chopped fine  
1 green pepper, chopped fine

(Continued)

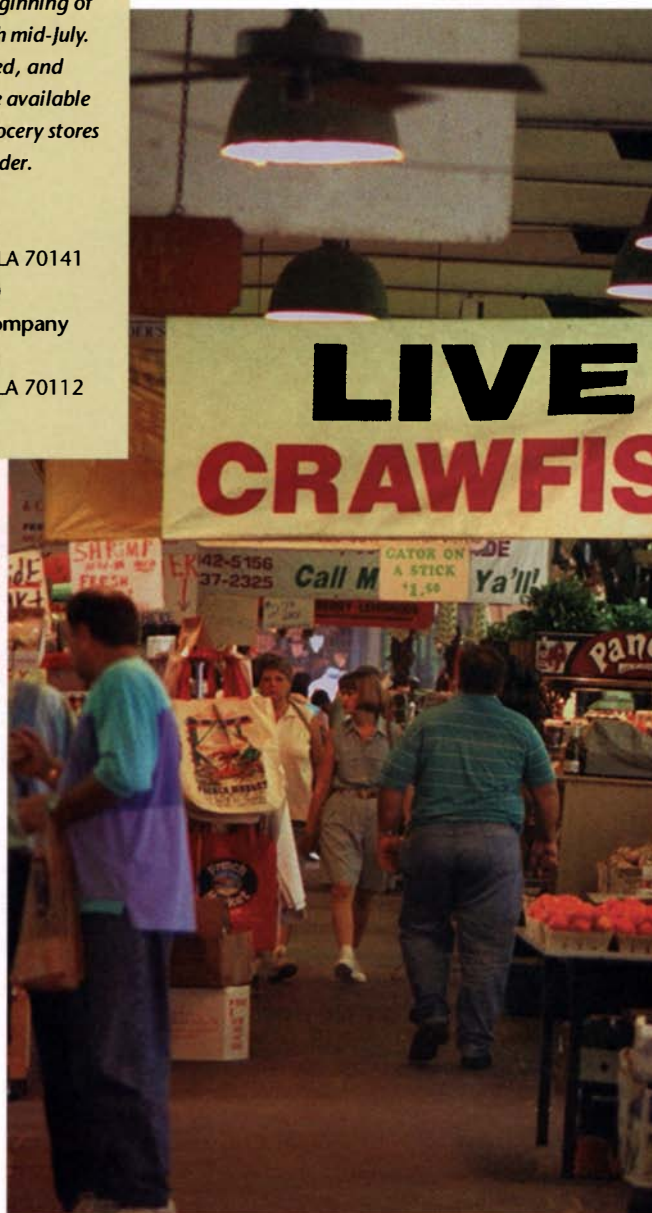
### MAIL-ORDER CRAWFISH SOURCES

*The season for fresh crawfish in Louisiana is roughly the beginning of March through mid-July. Cooked, cleaned, and frozen tails are available at specialty grocery stores and by mail order.*

Bayou to Go  
PO Box 20104  
New Orleans, LA 70141  
800/541-6610  
P&J Oyster Company  
1039 Toulouse  
New Orleans, LA 70112  
504/523-2651



*Briefly process the rice mixture for the boudin cakes, not so long that it becomes a purée. You want to keep some of the grainy texture but to chop the mixture enough so that it will hold together when formed into cakes.*



*The heart and soul of Louisiana cooking come from its wealth of local ingredients, available at their peak from New Orleans' French Market. Access to top-quality ingredients in any region of the country is often through local farmers' markets.*



1 medium onion, chopped fine  
 1 cup raw rice  
 1½ cups fish stock or 1 cup chicken stock and ⅔ cup water  
 1 tsp. salt  
 ½ lb. cooked, shelled crawfish tails (see the recipe above for details)

In a saucepan, melt the butter. Add the celery, green pepper, and onion and sauté 2 min. Stir in the rice. Add the fish stock (or chicken stock and water) and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce heat, and simmer until the rice is tender, about 20 min. Chop the crawfish and stir in. Taste for seasoning and add salt if needed. Let the rice cool slightly. Whir in a food processor just long enough to chop the mixture (as shown in the photo, at left), but not so long that it becomes a purée.

Form the mixture into eight cakes by hand and put them on a buttered baking sheet, or pack the rice lightly into small ramekins and unmold onto the sheet. When ready to serve, reheat in a 350°F oven for 15 to 20 min. and then transfer to plates with a wide metal spatula.

### ROASTED CHICKEN WITH HONEY RED-PEPPER SAUCE

Creole Seasoning Mix and olive oil give this version a crusty, deliciously flavored skin. We suggest a pinot noir with this dish. You might not normally think of red wine with chicken, but it often works well. In this case, the chicken is fairly highly seasoned and served with an intense sauce. The fruitiness and spiciness of pinot noir echo the same qualities in the sauce. You wouldn't want to serve just any red: a merlot or cabernet, for instance, would overpower the chicken. Serves eight.

2 chickens, 2½ to 3 lb. each  
 ¼ cup Creole Seasoning Mix, p. 44  
 3 Tbs. olive oil  
 2 red peppers, diced fine  
 ½ medium onion, diced fine  
 2 tsp. red-wine vinegar  
 1 Tbs. honey  
 1 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce

Heat the oven to 425°F. Season the chickens inside and out with all but 1 tsp. of the Creole Seasoning and then rub with 2 Tbs. oil. Put the chickens in the oven. After 10 min., reduce the heat to 350°. Continue cooking until the skin is golden brown and the meat is just done, about 50 min. longer. Remove and let rest.

Meanwhile, cook the red pepper and onion gently in the remaining 1 Tbs. of the oil in a covered frying pan until soft but not browned, about 15 min. Set aside.

When the chicken is done, skim the excess fat from the roasting-pan juices and add the pepper mixture to the pan. Heat, scraping up any cooked-on drippings with a wooden spatula. Whisk in the vinegar, honey, Worcestershire sauce, and reserved Creole Seasoning to taste. Cut each chicken into four serving pieces and serve with the sauce.

### CREOLE RATATOUILLE

Ratatouille is too good to reserve for the summertime. Make this well ahead of serving if you like. Our Creole version is extra-easy to make, and it's equally good warm or cold. Makes about 5 cups.

1-lb. can peeled tomatoes, drained and chopped  
 1 green pepper, chopped  
 1 medium onion, chopped  
 1 lb. eggplant, peeled and cut into ½-in. dice  
 1 tsp. Creole Seasoning Mix, p. 44  
 1½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce

1½ tsp. hot red-pepper sauce  
 ½ cup chicken stock  
 1 Tbs. chopped fresh basil (or 1 tsp. dried)

Put all the ingredients in a saucepan and simmer until the vegetables are tender, about 20 min. Taste and add salt as needed.

### WHITE-CHOCOLATE BREAD PUDDING WITH WHITE-CHOCOLATE SAUCE

In New Orleans, our long French rolls are crisp on the outside, light and airy within. They're great for this recipe since they soak up custard more readily than heavier breads. Use whatever is available to you that's good but light—perhaps an Italian or Viennese bread. Serve the pudding warm or make it a day ahead and cut it into squares or triangles. For wine, a sauternes is ideal. Serves eight.

1 roll, 10 in. long and 2½ in. in diameter or the equivalent amount of bread

2 cups heavy cream  
 ½ cup milk  
 ¼ cup sugar  
 9 oz. white chocolate, chopped  
 1 egg  
 4 egg yolks  
 Semisweet chocolate for garnish (optional)

Cut the roll into eight slices, place on middle rack of a 250°F oven, and leave until dry, about 20 min.

In a saucepan, heat 1½ cups of the heavy cream, the milk, and the sugar over low heat, stirring until sugar is dissolved. Add 5 oz. of the white chocolate, stir until melted, and remove from the heat. In a large bowl, whisk the egg and yolks together. Whisk the chocolate mixture into the eggs a little at a time.

Tear the bread into 1-in. pieces, add to the white chocolate custard, and stir to mix. Leave to soak, stirring occasionally, until all the custard has been absorbed by the bread, 1 to 2 hours. Put the mixture into an 8-in. square, 2-in. deep baking dish. Put the dish in a slightly larger pan and add hot water to come halfway up the sides of the baking dish. Bake the pudding in the water bath at 350° for 45 to 50 min., until the custard is set and the top is golden brown.

Serve warm or cold. If you chill it, loosen the sides with a metal spatula and invert the pudding onto a cutting surface. We like to cut it into four squares and cut each square into a triangle, which we serve standing on one edge.

For the sauce, heat the remaining cream in a small pan. Add the remaining 4 oz. white chocolate and melt. If you like, grate some semisweet chocolate and sprinkle on top of the pudding.



Photos: Judith Hill

**White-Chocolate Bread Pudding with White-Chocolate Sauce.** A sweet and mellow dessert soothes the palate after a spicy meal. The pudding offers textural contrast within itself, too—the chewy, golden brown surface sets off the smooth custard underneath.

Ti Martin began her restaurant career at the tender age of ten. Her job was to stamp “souvenir” on the menus that customers took home from her family’s restaurant. She later worked in two other Brennan restaurants before starting her own, Palace Café, with her cousins. ♦

# Great American Cheeses

Domestic delights and where to find them

BY ARI WEINZWEIG

*Same beginning, different results. Dry Jack (left) actually starts as a very flavorful Monterey Jack (right). It's first air-dried, then its rind is coated with unsweetened cocoa and black pepper, and finally it's aged at least six months. The result is a hard, golden cheese with a nutty flavor.*

Now, I know that a lot of folks snicker at the mere mention of American cheese—they can't get those thin, square, processed, and dyed slices out of their minds. But in buying cheeses for my shop in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I've discovered that we have a long tradition of great cheeses that are as distinctive, as flavorful, as interesting as the finest Europe has to offer.

I'd be surprised if you've tasted more than one or two of the cheeses on my list. You certainly won't have found any of them in supermarkets, where imported Roquefort, Parmesan, and Swiss get all the attention.

Some of these American cheeses began as recreations of cheeses from the old country, but they long ago became distinctive originals in their own right. I've yet to find anything in Europe like a Dry Jack, a Teleme, or a piece of well-aged Crowley. If you're looking for cheese with







*Traditional Teleme is a soft, runny cheese with a delicate flavor that deepens as it ages.*

flavor and character, cheese that's nourishment for the soul and the palate, you'll find that my choices deliver on all counts.

There's more flavor in a bite of great cheese than in a pound of the industrial stuff. Put a sliver of a great cheese on your tongue. Let it melt. Like one of those nesting Russian dolls, it has flavors within flavors within flavors.

Great cheese knows where it comes from. It has roots, an identity, a connection to the area in which it is made, even to the pastures in which the animals graze. It's never defined by trends. To the contrary, it survives in spite of trends.

Great cheese has character. Imagine a vine-ripened, succulent tomato from the farmers' market. It doesn't taste exactly like every other tomato at the market. I look for that character in a cheese.

Great cheese changes with the seasons, its age, the weather, the animals' food, the mood of the maker. The tremendous variety in cheese makes me approach a sample from each new wheel with the eager anticipation of a kid in front of a pile of chocolate—with no adults in sight.

Finally, I like supporting the people who make the little-recognized fine cheeses of America. Making great cheese is a tough job. Your hands are "in the curd" six or seven days a week—turning wheel after wheel, rubbing rind after rind. These people have stayed true to their craft and contributed to the richness of this country's character.

**Dry Monterey Jack**—To my mind, this is the greatest of American cheeses. Dry Jack dates back to World War I,

when a San Francisco grocer had his supply of aged grating cheese from Italy cut off for the duration. Desperate to satisfy his customers, he came upon a pallet of Monterey Jack that had been forgotten in the shop's cellar. Amazingly, what had started out mild and soft had turned into an incredibly delicious, firm-textured, and full-flavored cheese.

At one time dozens of dairies in northern California made Dry Jack. Today there are only two. My favorite is Vella Cheese in Sonoma. The Vellas have been handcrafting and carefully aging Dry Jack since 1931. Thousands of wheels stand on edge, supported by wooden racks, in their aging rooms. The cheese is aged anywhere from six months to six years. I prefer Dry Jack that's twelve to fourteen months old, which the Vellas refer to as their *Special Select*. It has a golden cast and a rich, nutty flavor.

Dry Jack is mild enough to appeal to novices, yet complex enough to satisfy demanding cheese lovers. It's also a wonderful grating cheese, an all-American alternative to Parmesan.

**Teleme**—The name is Greek, the maker is Italian, but Teleme is strictly American. The Pelusos are the only remaining makers of traditional Teleme. Franklin Peluso is the third generation (his grandfather got things going in 1925) to craft Teleme in the central California town of Los Banos.

A slice off a young (four- to six-week-old) Teleme is soft, but not runny. Its flavor is mild, delicate, with a nice touch of tartness on the tongue—great with fresh fruit, or sliced on sandwiches. I prefer a

## An overview of how cheese is made

Although there are hundreds of different cheeses made round the world, nearly all of them are variants of one basic procedure.

The process starts with fresh milk. The milk is warmed, and starter bacteria cultures are added to help develop flavor. The cheesemaker then adds rennet, which is made from the stomach lining of grazing animals, or a microbial "vegetarian" substitute for rennet. Rennet causes the milk to separate into solids (known as curds) and liquid (or whey). The cheesemaker drains off the whey, and then begins making the curd into cheese.

How the curd is handled determines the final form of the cheese. Break it into tiny pieces, add salt and cream, and you'll have cottage cheese. Mill the curd into even finer pieces, salt it, press it in large wheels or blocks, age it for a year, and you've got a cheddar. Form it into bricks, let the right kind of natural bacteria grow on the rind to ripen it, and you have smear-ripened Brick cheese.

Of course, the process isn't quite that simple. A good cheesemaker is intimately involved with hundreds of details that go into crafting a fine traditional cheese. But you get the idea.—A.W.



*Real Brick (left) and Limburger (right) both have full, authoritative flavor.*

Teleme that's been allowed to age longer, up to four months. Ripe Teleme is a truly luscious, creamy, almost runny cheese that far surpasses any factory-made Brie or Camembert the French send over here. Its flavor is complex, never strong, but highly distinctive, with an aroma of fresh cream and a hint of wild mushrooms. Teleme is a treat spread on crusty sourdough bread and accompanied by a glass of chardonnay. I love to melt it over boiled, forked-open new potatoes.

The Pelusos make two versions, so be sure to ask for the traditional one, whose thin, natural rind is dusted with rice flour, *not* the plastic-sealed, rindless cheese made for the supermarket trade.

**Real Brick**—This cheese, as opposed to the supermarket variety of the same name, is wonderfully full flavored. “Invented” in Wisconsin in 1877 by Swiss immigrant John Jossi, real Brick is what's known as a *washed-rind* cheese. The Swiss-German community in Wisconsin call it *smear ripening*. Young Brick cheeses are “smeared,” or washed by hand, with a special bacterium that ripens them from the inside out, leaving the cheese with a reddish-brown natural rind. The bacteria break down the paste of the cheese. The older it gets, the softer the cheese and the fuller the flavor.

At one time, Brick was made all over the state. Today there are only a handful of traditional makers. Chalet Cheese in Monroe, Wisconsin, has been making Brick since the early 1900s. Each wheel is hand-salted, hand-turned, and aged on traditional wooden shelving. It's at its best at three to four months old, when its

full flavor has had time to develop. I love to eat this cheese with an American microbrew, either a Pilsner or a light ale, and slices of dark bread. Chalet makes a “commercial” variety as well, so be sure to ask for the traditional, smear-ripened cheese, preferably a well-aged piece.

**Crowley**—Crowley cheese has been made in Healdville, Vermont, since 1882 at the oldest continuously operating cheese factory in the country. Once, cheeses like Crowley were made all over New England, called *store cheese*, and sold in every shop. Today Kent Smith, Crowley's current owner, is one of only a couple of people who make this traditional New England specialty.

Crowley is not a cheddar, although it is similar. Crowley is more open-textured,

moister, softer, and tangier than a cheddar. Smith still works with the original recipe, using only unpasteurized milk and traditional techniques. I prefer Crowley that has been aged for about a year—what they refer to as *sharp*—when the cheese's full flavor is at its most distinctive. This is a great eating cheese, and it's also good on sandwiches.

**Maytag Blue**—Yes, this cheese is made by the same folks who started the washing-machine company. But while they long ago sold off their interest in washing machines, the Maytags have held onto their cheese. They've been making Maytag Blue in Newton, Iowa, since 1939. Although they recently sold their herd of Friesian dairy cows, they continue to use only the finest locally produced, unpasteurized milk. The cheese is made into eight-pound wheels and then cave-aged to develop its distinctive blue veining.

Maytag Blue is wonderfully rich and creamy, with a sweet, nutty flavor. I like it best on salads, but it's also great on burgers and with apples or pears.

**Shelburne Farms Vermont Cheddar**—Cheddar has its origins in southwest England, but American cheddars have been made so long that they've taken on a character of their own, distinctive from their English ancestors.

Shelburne Farms, built in the late 19th century, has been making superb cheddar since 1981. They use only the



*Two Vermont specialties—Crowley (large and small wedges, right) and Shelburne Farms cheddar (left)—share some characteristics but differ in texture and flavor.*





*Rich, tangy Maytag Blue goes well with the sweetness of apples and pears.*

exceptionally rich, unpasteurized milk of their Brown Swiss cows, and traditional cheddar-making techniques. As a result, the cheese has none of the bite or bitterness that often mark mass-produced cheddars. Shelburne's is one of the richest, creamiest, most intensely flavored cheddars you'll find. It makes the best grilled cheese sandwich I've ever had.

**Real Monterey Jack**—I long ago gave up on the bland stuff I saw in supermarkets, but real Monterey Jack is a delicious cheese. I love to watch people's reactions when they find out that Monterey Jack can actually have flavor. A couple of dairies still make real Monterey Jack; I prefer Vella's.

Monterey Jack has its roots in the cheesemaking traditions of Spain. As Spanish Franciscan friars moved their way up the coast in the 18th and 19th centuries, establishing the missions that still dot the California countryside, so did their recipe for *queso blanco*, the fresh, white cheese of their homeland. In 1882, a Scot named David Jacks began to produce large quantities of this traditional cheese for the growing community of gold miners. His cheese grew so famous that it came to be known by his name, *Monterey Jacks*. The "s" got lost along the line, but the cheese remained.

Made by hand and aged only a few weeks, real Monterey Jack is mild but flavorful, with a delicate milky taste. Aged a few weeks longer, it becomes softer, creamier, almost spreadable, and more pungent. A tasty melting cheese for omelets, pizzas, and sandwiches, it's also great for Mexican dishes.

**Limburger**—Cheese lovers who think they have to buy French cheese to get full flavor ought to try this. While Limburger is of Belgian origin, it was once one of the most popular American cheeses, made by dozens of small dairies. Today only a couple of producers are left. Chalet Cheese is my favorite. Their Limburger has a creamy, tongue-pleasing, spreadable texture and an assertive, tangy flavor. Don't be put off by its strong aroma. Its flavor is mellower than its scent indicates. I love to snack on Limburger with a heavy-bodied ale, add it to a roast beef sandwich, or eat it with German salami and pumpernickel.

**Serve at room temperature.** I can't overstate the importance of serving cheese at room temperature (about 70°F). The difference in flavor between two wedges of the same cheese, one at room temperature and one right out of the refrigerator, is remarkable. The colder the weather and the harder the cheese, the longer it takes to warm up. A well-aged cheddar in Wisconsin in January may take five hours to warm up, while a piece of Teleme in the heat of the summer might require a mere 30 minutes.

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*Ari Weinzwieg has loved cheese for as long as he can remember. One of his favorite childhood treats was a couple of slices of American, peeled right off the stack. As co-owner of Zingerman's Delicatessen in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he has been honing his cheese-tasting skills for over ten years. A native of Chicago, Weinzwieg studied Russian history before veering off in the direction of the kitchen. ♦*

## RESOURCES

The **American Cheese Society** is a grassroots, nonprofit organization whose members are cheesemakers, retailers, chefs, consumers—anyone with an interest in American cheeses. The ACS puts out a bimonthly newsletter and holds an annual conference where cheese lovers from around the country gather to talk and taste cheese. For information on joining, contact the ACS at 34 Downing St., New York, NY 10014; 212/727-7939.

### Mail-order sources

**Dean & DeLuca**, 560 Broadway, New York, NY 10012; 800/221-7714, stocks most of these cheeses.

**The Pasta Shop**, Rockridge Market Hall, 5655 College Ave., Oakland, CA 94618; 510/547-4005, stocks most of the cheeses and will special order the others.

**Zingerman's Delicatessen**, 422 Detroit St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104; 313/663-3400, regularly stocks all of these cheeses.

*You can also order directly from the cheese-makers mentioned in the article. Contact them for information.*

**Chalet Cheese Co-op**, N4858 Cty. N, Monroe, WI 53566; 608/325-4343. Ships mid-September to mid-May only.

**Crowley Cheese**, Healdville Rd., Healdville, VT 05758; 802/259-2340.

**Maytag Dairy Farms, Inc.**, PO Box 806, Newton, IA 50206; 800/247-2458.

**Peluso Cheese, Inc.**, 429 H St., Los Banos, CA 93635; 209/826-3744.

**Shelburne Farms**, Shelburne, VT 05482; 802/985-8686.

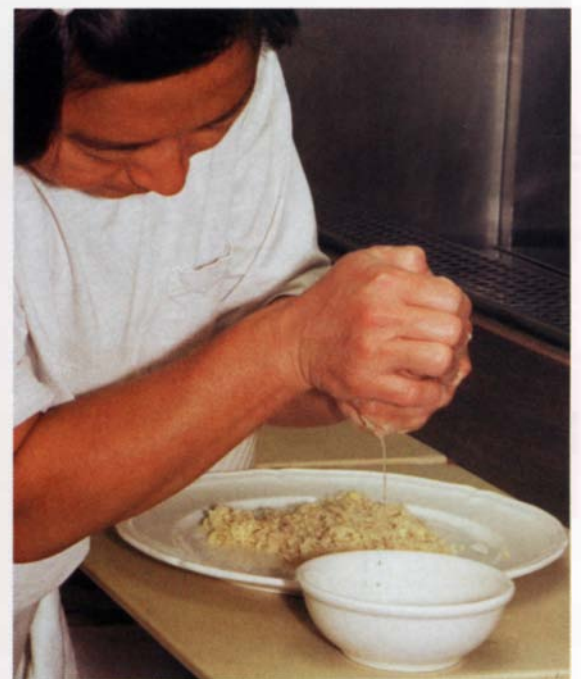
**Vella Cheese**, PO Box 191, Sonoma, CA 95476; 800/848-0505.



# How to Handle Fresh Ginger

Choosing, storing, and using

BY JACKIE SHEN



**Ginger juice.** For ginger in its most potent form, give peeled chunks a whirl in the food processor and then squeeze. Use the juice in marinades and sauces.

**Fresh ginger is crunchy and juicy, not fibrous.** Look for the hardest, smoothest-skinned ginger you can find. If possible, snap off a piece. The break should be clean and have no protruding fibers. Jackie Shen and her staff peel up to twenty pounds a week.



To me, the ultimate joy in cooking is to use fresh ginger. Growing up in Hong Kong, whether hanging around my mom's kitchen or playing near "food street," I could always detect the lingering scent of ginger—that clean, crisp smell. In my restaurant, I keep the fondly remembered fragrance in the air by using ginger in several forms—diced, julienned, sliced, and juiced. Now that ginger is available in supermarkets, everyone can learn to use it, adding crunch, savor, depth of flavor, and a tingle of heat to quickly cooked dishes from steamed salmon to stir-fried pork.

## HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST GINGER

Whenever I had the chance to go to the market with my mother, I watched her carefully choose the firmest ginger with the smoothest skin. Fresh ginger is hard. It breaks cleanly with a snap. If you see wiry protruding fibers at the break, you have old ginger. And if the skin is wrinkled, your piece of ginger is positively aged.

As with most produce, the fresher the ginger the better. When it's so fresh that it's as unyielding to the touch as a potato, the ginger is juicy, hot, and sweet, with no bitterness. Fibrous older ginger does have its purposes, though. Even when withered, ginger can be used in braised dishes and in broths. The Chinese believe that tea steeped from old ginger warms the womb of a mother who has just given birth and helps her to heal better and faster.

Young ginger—as opposed to fresh, but fully developed—is another story altogether. Harvested before complete maturity, young ginger (also called baby or green ginger) may be as large as it gets but is moist with only the beginnings of the papery, beige skin that will form later. It isn't literally green but ivory, usually with pink or violet tips. Young ginger, which can be found in Asian markets, is required for pickling, preserving in syrup, and candying.

## HOW TO KEEP GINGER

If you're lucky enough to have access to young ginger, it can be preserved for long periods of time by pickling, by cooking for a short time in plain sugar syrup and storing it in same, or by cooking it in syrup long enough so that it's slightly chewy and then rolling it in sugar (candying).

Most of us are happy enough to get nice, fresh, fully developed ginger and can buy it so easily that elaborate preservation methods aren't necessary. Wrapped in aluminum foil or swaddled in a paper towel and slipped into a plastic bag (which shouldn't be tightly closed), it will keep in the refrigerator crisper drawer for up to a month. I buy it every few days and just leave it out in a dry spot.

Fresh ginger can also be kept submerged in sherry or rice wine. In my opinion, this practice may

have a better effect on the flavor of the wine than on that of the ginger. I go for the fresh every time. If you don't use ginger so often as I do, you might keep a piece in the freezer. The crisp texture goes, but frozen ginger is fine for juice. Dried slices and powdered ginger have an entirely different flavor from fresh and are not a good substitute.

## HOW TO USE GINGER

At my restaurant, I use ginger in four forms—sliced, julienned, diced, and juiced. Each has a different purpose in my kitchen.

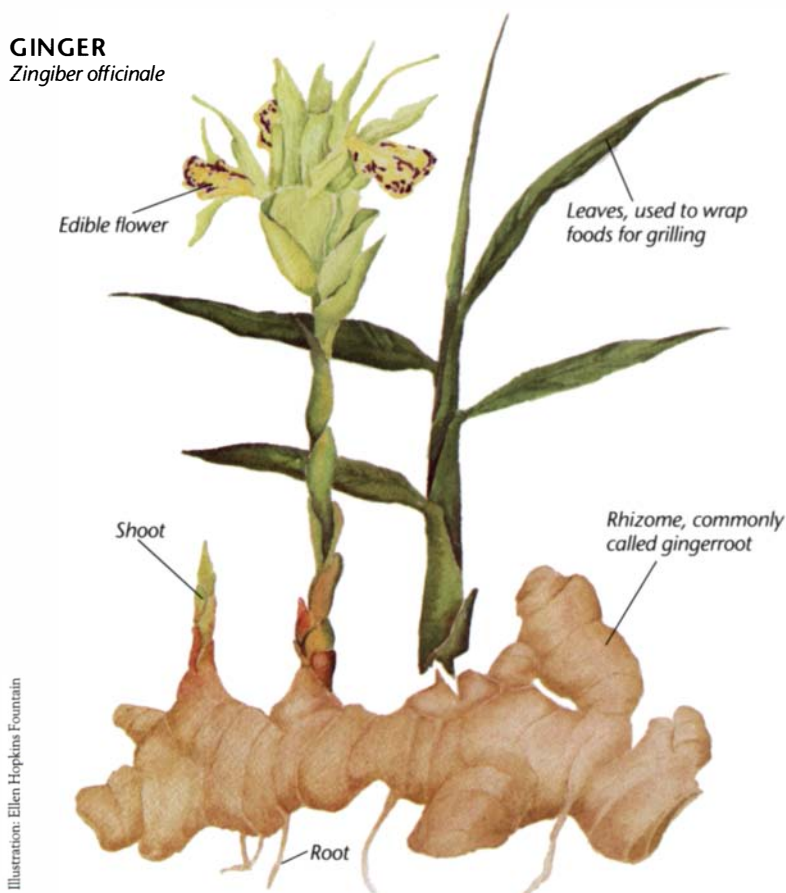
**Sliced**—To flavor oil, thick slices are best because you can cook them long enough to get the flavor out. They don't burn up so fast as dice or julienne.

**Ginger oil** can be made quickly by putting twelve slices of ginger and a half cup of peanut oil in a small frying pan and cooking over medium heat until the ginger is browned and the oil is almost smoking. Remove the pan from the heat and take out the ginger; what remains is a tasty oil that you can use to dress pasta or make into a sauce for fish. For a spicier oil, add a few whole, dried hot peppers with the ginger.

For the simplest sauce made from ginger oil, just whisk in two tablespoons of soy sauce (I like Kikko-

## GINGER

*Zingiber officinale*



**Gingerroot is really a rhizome**, an underground stem. The real roots are the stringy extensions growing from the bottom of the rhizome. When dug up as young ginger, it's moist, almost slippery. Later, as shown here, it has developed its characteristic papery skin. The plant needs a tropical climate, and most sold in the U.S. comes from Jamaica or Hawaii.



*Ginger juice separates into liquid on the top and a starch that settles to the bottom. The liquid tastes slightly bitter on its own but is sweet and delicious when combined with the starch. A finger is the best tool for stirring the two together.*

*Cut ginger in slices, julienne strips, or tiny dice. For the largest slices, cut the ginger on the diagonal rather than straight up and down. Good for stir-fried dishes, the strips are about one-eighth-inch thick and two inches long.*



Photo: Robert Marzala

man's best). This quantity is enough to sauce about two pounds of fish fillets—salmon, tuna, or whitefish. For a light main dish, poach the fish—and add a few thin slices of ginger to the poaching liquid.

**Julienned**—I use a thin julienne of ginger (strips about an eighth of an inch wide, see photo below) in stir-fried dishes, not only for the flavor but also for the texture. Ginger complements virtually any combination of meat and vegetables. Pork, snow peas, and carrots is one of my favorites (see recipe below).

Since much of the point of ginger in a stir-fried dish is the texture, a cross between chewy and crunchy, you want to avoid overcooking. Have rice or noodles ready to go and serve the dish right away.

**Diced**—In my restaurant, I use tiny dice, just about an eighth of an inch, in a couple of ways.

**Ginger marinade**, made with ginger dice, a little white wine, and soy sauce, is great for fish or meat. Good proportions are one-quarter cup diced ginger and two tablespoons wine to each cup of soy. When I pour off the marinade, however, I don't remove the dice, thus allowing the flavor of the ginger to penetrate the food further while cooking.

I also like to put the crunch and zing of ginger dice into fillings for wontons. More about that later.

**Juiced**—Juice is ginger in its most potent form. The easiest way of preparing ginger to extract its juice is to peel the skin, cut the flesh into chunks, and spin them in a food processor for a minute or two. You could also grate it or cut and smash it with a knife until it's almost a pulp. Then you just squeeze it in your hand (see photo, p. 52). Two pounds of fresh ginger yield approximately three-quarters of a cup of juice.

Before using the ginger juice, you must stir well, taking special care to incorporate the starchy residue that will settle at the bottom of the container. Scrape up the starch with a rubber spatula or, my preference, a finger (see photo above left). The clear ginger juice that you pour off the top has a slightly bitter taste, but when you stir up the starch in the bottom, the juice tastes sweet and even more gingery.

I use this juice either in a marinade or to flavor a sauce. You could use three tablespoons of juice instead of the diced ginger in the marinade suggested above. I like the ginger soy-sauce marinade either way. The flavor of the juice penetrates the meat a bit better than does that of the dice, but you can do whatever is most convenient at the moment.

One of the best dishes at the restaurant, and one that illustrates the use of both dice and juice is crab, chèvre, and diced-ginger wontons with ginger-juice butter sauce. The whole dish is flavored with ginger, and the sweet, sharp sensation when you bite into one of the little dice inside the wonton is a special surprise. For the recipe, see the following page.



Photos except where noted: Judith Hill

*Stir-Fried Pork Tenderloin with Ginger Julienne. The point of using ginger in a stir-fried dish is not only for flavor but also for texture. Cook and serve quickly so you don't lose the crunch.*

## STIR-FRIED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH SNOW PEAS, CARROTS, AND GINGER JULIENNE

You can use the recipe as is or as a guide, substituting as you like—perhaps chicken instead of pork or mushrooms and red peppers for the vegetables. I like to add a julienne of shiitake mushrooms, tossing them in with the rest of the vegetables. I like red wine with pork, but nothing too heavy. A light pinot noir would be my choice over a heavier cabernet or even a medium-weight merlot. *Serves four.*

2 carrots  
8 slices ginger, 1/8-in. thick  
1/2 lb. snow peas  
2 scallions  
2 lb. pork tenderloin  
1/3 cup peanut oil  
4 cloves garlic  
2 Tbs. white wine  
1/4 cup soy sauce

**Prepare the ingredients.** Cut the carrots into strips 1/8 in. in diameter and 2 in. long. Bring a small pan of water to a boil, and add salt and the carrot julienne. Boil until just barely tender, drain, and set aside.

Cut 8 slices of ginger on the diagonal to make them as large as possible. Then cut into 1/8-in. strips. Snap off the stems from the snow peas and remove the string. Chop the scallions, including some of the green top. Cut the pork into thin slices and then into 1/4-in. strips.

**Stir-fry.** Heat the oil in a frying pan over high heat. You can use a wok, but my training was under a French chef, and a regular pan always seems fine to me. Add the pork and stir while cooking.

After 1 min., add the blanched carrots, the snow peas, and the ginger. Stir and cook for another couple of minutes. Add the scallions and garlic and then the wine and soy sauce.





*Crab and Chèvre Wontons with Ginger-Butter Sauce use diced ginger in the wontons and ginger juice in the sauce. The wontons are arranged on a bed of Chinese cabbage and shiitake mushrooms and are garnished with lettuce leaves, flowers, and salmon caviar. The last two are optional.*

### CRAB AND CHÈVRE WONTONS WITH GINGER-BUTTER SAUCE

You won't believe how well crabmeat, goat cheese, and ginger go together until you try these wontons. I have special striped wonton wrappers made for the restaurant, but the plain ones you can buy at the grocery store are fine. I offer this serving size as an appetizer, but people often split an order. Match the butter sauce and strong flavors in this dish with a buttery, full-flavored chardonnay. *Serves four.*

3 Tbs. fresh ginger in  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. dice  
16 wonton wrappers  
3 oz. crabmeat  
2 oz. fresh chèvre cheese  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  head Chinese cabbage, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb.  
6 oz. shiitake mushrooms  
3 Tbs. peanut oil  
Salt and pepper  
6 Tbs. white wine  
1 Tbs. chopped shallot  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. cold butter  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. ginger juice (see p. 54), or to more taste  
2 Tbs. sesame-seed oil  
8 leaves red-oak or other leaf lettuce  
8 edible flowers (optional)  
4 tsp. salmon caviar (optional)

**Wontons**—Dice the ginger. Lay the wonton wrappers on a work surface. Top each one with about 1 tsp. of crab, the same quantity of cheese, and a sprinkling of diced ginger.

Moisten the edges of each wrapper in turn with warm water and fold it as shown at right. Blanch the filled wontons in boiling salted water just until they begin to soften, about 2 min. Drain well and spread out on a plate.

**Cabbage and shiitake bed**—Shred the cabbage and cut the shiitakes into thin strips. Over medium heat, sauté the vegetables quickly in the peanut oil until they're just barely cooked. You might want to undercook them at this

point since they'll be reheated later. Season them with salt and pepper.

**Ginger-butter sauce**—In a small, heavy saucepan, boil the wine and shallot until the wine has reduced to about 1 tsp.

Over the lowest possible heat, start whisking in the butter 1 Tbs. at a time. As soon as a piece is almost incorporated into the sauce, add another. The butter should soften and form a smooth sauce but not melt completely. Move the pan on and off the heat if necessary to keep the sauce from getting so warm that it melts.

Whisk in the ginger juice and salt and pepper to taste. Set the saucepan in a larger pan of barely warm water so that it doesn't cool off.

**Finishing**—Heat the oven to 450°F. In a large frying pan or skillet that can be transferred to the oven, sauté the wontons in the sesame-seed oil until golden on both sides. Put the pan in the oven for 2 min. and reheat the cabbage and mushrooms on the stove.

Arrange the lettuce and flowers on plates. Spoon a strip of cabbage and mushrooms down the center and top with the wontons.

Pour the butter sauce over and around the wontons and garnish with 1 tsp. of salmon caviar in the middle of each plate.

*Jackie Shen goes through about twenty pounds of ginger a week in her Chicago restaurant, "Jackie's." She came to America from Hong Kong when she was seventeen and was trained in classic French cuisine at the restaurant Le Mer in Chicago. Her own restaurant, where she combines French and Chinese tastes and techniques, has been thriving for eleven years. Her mother still shapes all the wontons. ♦*



*Folding ginger wontons. 1. Spoon crabmeat and chèvre on the wrapper and top with diced ginger.*



*2. Moisten the edges with warm water, fold the wonton in half, and press to seal.*



*3. Fold over the longest of the sealed edges. Allow a quarter or half inch and fold but don't press down.*



*4. Twist to join the two corners that aren't folded back. Moisten one of the corners and press the two together.*



# Making the Most of Flank Steak

Tasty cut is tough customer

BY LISSA DOUMANI & HIROYOSHI SONE





For years, flank steak was just about the cheapest cut of beef you could buy, and in those days it was commonly braised and stewed. You'd never have found it on a restaurant menu, although when we were chefs at Spago in Los Angeles, we ate flank steak at staff dinners. Now it's accepted and popular among home cooks and chefs alike.

Once restaurants discovered it, demand drove the price up. Now that flank steak can cost as much as more tender steak from the loin, it makes sense to treat it like a choicer cut. But since it's expensive and not so tender, why buy it in the first place? The answer is that it's simply one of the most flavorful cuts a steer has to offer.

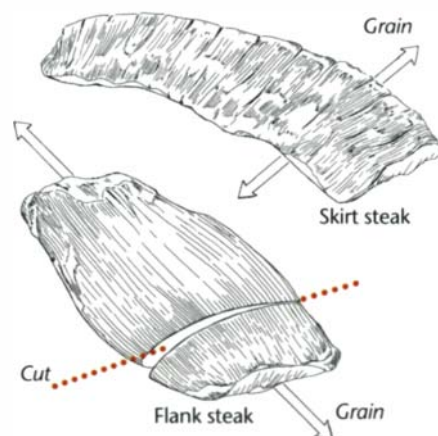
## FLANK STEAK PRIMER

The flank of a steer is the lower belly behind the ribs. Each side of beef yields just one flank steak—a flat muscle, oval in shape, between one and three pounds and about two inches thick. Flank steak has very little fat and a noticeably coarse grain that runs the length of the piece (see illustration), a very important characteristic, as we'll explain later. First, though, we want to mention a cut of beef similar to flank in appearance and character, and that is skirt steak.

Skirt steak also comes from the underside of the steer, from a section of the belly known as the plate, which lies just forward of the flank. The skirt is up to two feet long, about six to seven inches wide and about an inch and a half thick. Like flank steak, skirt has a thin, patchy covering of fat and a well-defined grain. Unlike flank's lengthwise grain, the grain in skirt steak runs across the cut. It's important to be able to tell flank and skirt apart: we've seen skirt steak sold as flank steak in some markets. Skirt usually is—and should be—less expensive because it's even stringier and tougher than flank, although you can use the two in much the same way.

The term *grain* describes the direction in which the muscle fibers lie. Muscles work in one direction only, and the more work they have to do, the more defined the grain will be. Look at most pieces of meat and you'll actually see the lines of muscle fibers going in one direction, unless it's a cut such as a round steak that slices through the muscle longitudinally (across the grain, rather than along it).

*For a classic bistro meal, serve a paillard of flank steak with a shallot sauce and french fries (see recipe, p. 59).*



*For tenderest results, slice across the grain.*

Knowing what part of an animal's body the muscle serves tells us what the meat is like. Those lower belly muscles were used every time the animal took a step or even breathed. The stronger the muscle, the tougher—but often the more flavorful—the meat. A cut from the flank will be tougher than, say, the filet, which hangs out up on the back and doesn't work very hard. It will also be a lot more tender than the shank or lower leg, which not only gets heavy use but also has a lot of connective tissue, or gristle.

Flank has very little internal fat, so it's a good choice for people who are concerned about fat intake but who want to eat beef. Most of the fat in this cut is on the outside and can be easily removed. *Marbling*, the term for tiny pockets of fat distributed throughout meat, is characteristic of the tenderest cuts of beef, like a New York steak. Connoisseurs prize marbling for the flavor it gives. In the rush toward health, however, everyone wants leaner meat. As the industry responds to public demand, the fat percentage in meats will continue to go down. But as meat gets leaner, we sacrifice flavor and tenderness.

## STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING TENDERNESS

There are several strategies for dealing with flank steak to ensure that it's as tender as possible when it comes to the table. In our kitchen, two are non-negotiable: we never overcook the meat, and we always cut it into thin slices across the grain. Beyond that, there's the option of marinating for a few hours. A fourth is to pound the steak with a meat hammer. We always use

the first two strategies; sometimes we use all four.

**Slice across the grain**—Whether you're slicing the flank steak before it's cooked or after, always cut across the grain. This is true of any meat product. Cutting across the grain results in short meat fibers that are easy to chew. Because the grain runs lengthwise on a flank steak, all you have to do is cut straight across and you've got it.

Some people like to cut flank steak at an angle as well as across the grain. Instead of little thin slices you get something that looks more like a slice of a roast. This idea may have started in restaurants to give the servings better eye appeal. To slice this way, hold your knife at a 30° angle to the top of the steak and slice across the grain. To get a smooth slice without ragged edges, try not to saw and use only a couple of strokes of the knife to cut each slice.

**Pound lightly to break fibers**—Pounding slices of flank steak with a meat mallet helps break up the



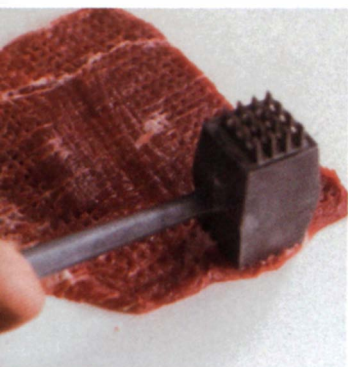
*Slicing meat across the grain gives the tenderest results. For flank steak with its lengthwise grain, this means cutting straight across. Here, Hiro Sone slices seared flank steak ever so thin for his version of carpaccio.*



*For better eye appeal, cut larger pieces of meat by slicing the steak into scallops. Hold the knife at about a 30° angle and cut slices a quarter inch thick. Then pound the scallops briefly if desired, and marinate.*



*To make a paillard (meat pounded for grilling), hold the knife at a very low angle, but not horizontal, and cut slices a quarter inch thick. The meat fibers are longer when sliced at this low angle.*



*Pounding the meat breaks up the fibers slightly, and so tenderizes the meat. Steak sliced and pounded in this way, then grilled, results in a paillard.*

fibers and also flattens the meat, allowing it to cook faster. You can use either the flat or the toothed face of your meat mallet. Be careful not to pound too much because the meat will start to break apart and develop holes, and it will lose all its juices when cooking. Once over the surface of the meat using the toothed face is enough.

**Marinate for flavor and tenderness**—Flank is the perfect candidate for marinating. Typically a marinade flavors and tenderizes. Most marinade recipes combine herbs, spices, and something acidic, such as wine, vinegar, or lemon juice. The acid breaks down the proteins in the muscle, and so tenderizes the meat. We've always argued that meat should not be left in strong marinades for a long time. Some recipes say it's okay to leave the meat in overnight, but we think all you get out of that is a steak with no meat flavor left in it and with a texture that's out of balance—too tender on the outside while still solid inside. Usually, three hours is plenty to impart flavor and to tenderize the meat. To find out if a marinade is the right strength, taste it. If it makes your mouth pucker, it's too strong.

When we want just flavor but not the tenderizing effect of a marinade, we do a dry rub of spices and herbs. This is simply a mixture of ingredients, such as salt, pepper, cayenne, thyme, chili powder, or cumin, rubbed on the meat. Because a dry rub doesn't affect the meat's texture, it can be left on for any length of time. For the same reason, if you're using just a dry rub, it's doubly important to cook the meat only briefly and to slice it extra thin to ensure tenderness. Sometimes we let the dry rub sit for a few hours, then follow it with a wet marinade for another couple of hours.

**Cook it briefly**—If you like your beef cooked on the done side of medium, you may not like what we have to tell you. The quickest way to ruin flank steak is to cook it beyond medium rare. You might as well eat your spare tire as an overcooked flank steak.

There are many ways to cook flank steak. We prefer to grill. Grilling adds another dimension of flavor to the meat, a smokiness you can't get by broiling it. And if there were any sugar products in the marinade, the fire caramelizes the outside just a bit. We love flank steak marinated in some Asian seasonings and cooked over a fire.

We also get great results from searing flank steak in a very hot pan or using it for beef fondue, cooking thin strips of steak in hot oil. Some people like to roll flank steak. Since we're sticking to our guns about not cooking flank steak past medium, it follows that we don't think it should be stuffed. By the time the ingredients inside the roll are adequately cooked, the outside meat will always be well done. The taste of the stuffing just doesn't compensate for the flavor the meat loses in overcooking.

## GRILLED MISO-MARINATED FLANK STEAK SALAD

Miso—fermented soybean paste—is available at Asian markets. There are several types, with different colors, flavors, and textures. We suggest that you marinate the meat for three hours, but you can leave it for a lot longer without ill effects. Miso won't break down the meat quickly, so if you need extra time, prepare the marinated meat and the vinaigrette the day before. We garnish this salad with a Japanese rice noodle, deep fried for less than a minute until puffy. We would serve the salad with a bottle of Caymus Conundrum, a blend of four grape varietals. The muscat provides sweetness for the miso, but this wine still has a good acid balance to go with the vinaigrette. *Serves four.*

### STEAK AND MARINADE:

1 Tbs. dark miso  
1 Tbs. sugar  
1 Tbs. mirin (sweet Japanese cooking wine)  
½ tsp. grated ginger  
½ tsp. grated garlic  
½ tsp. sesame oil  
Pinch cayenne pepper  
¾ lb. flank steak, trimmed

### SALAD:

½ stalk celery, trimmed  
½ Japanese cucumber  
¼ carrot, peeled  
1 medium tomato  
1½ tsp. cilantro leaves  
1½ tsp. mint leaves

### VINAIGRETTE:

½ tsp. peeled and chopped ginger  
½ tsp. minced garlic  
Pinch red-chile flakes  
½ cup rice-wine vinegar  
2 Tbs. sugar  
2 Tbs. soy sauce  
1½ tsp. Dijon mustard  
1½ tsp. sesame oil  
2 Tbs. corn oil

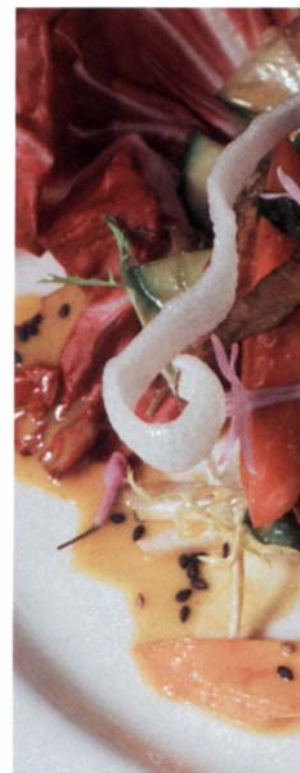
### TO FINISH:

4 large radicchio leaves  
1½ cups mixed baby lettuce  
8 cilantro sprigs  
2 tsp. sesame seeds  
½ oz. vermicelli-size rice noodles, deep fried (optional)

**Combine the marinade ingredients** in a bowl and whisk. Holding the knife at a 30° angle, slice the flank steak across the grain into 4 equal pieces. Pound with a toothed meat mallet to tenderize. Marinate 3 hours. To make the vinaigrette, purée all the ingredients in a blender.

**Grill the flank steak** until medium rare, about 5 min. total. Slice the cucumber and carrot in half lengthwise, and then cut them and the celery diagonally into pieces ⅛ in. thick by 3 in. long. (Do not cut the celery in half first.) Cut the tomato into 8 wedges. Slice the steak crosswise into ½-in. strips. Mix the beef and cut vegetables in a large bowl and toss with the vinaigrette.

**To assemble**, place a radicchio leaf on each plate to form an open cup. Put the lettuce in the radicchio cup and top with the salad. Garnish with cilantro sprigs, a sprinkling of sesame seeds, and the fried rice noodle if desired.



*Miso-marinated beef salad makes a light but satisfying meal. Strips of grilled flank steak and raw vegetables are dressed in a sweet, tangy Asian vinaigrette.*



## CARPACCIO OF BEEF WITH MARINATED CÈPES AND SHAVED PARMESAN

Traditional carpaccio is paper-thin slices of raw beef. We love our version of this dish because searing the flank steak briefly adds a touch of smokiness that's perfect with the Parmesan. Make individual plates or one big plate served family style. If fresh cèpes (also called porcini mushrooms) are unavailable, use shiitake, chanterelle, or oyster mushrooms. Caper berries are the fruit of the same plant whose brined flower buds we eat as capers. Look for caper berries at specialty food shops, but if you can't find them, substitute regular capers. With all the flavor in this dish, we like a wine that has a lot of strength of character but softer tannins, such as a cabernet sauvignon. *Serves four.*

### FOR THE CARPACCIO:

2 Tbs. olive oil  
¾ lb. flank steak  
Salt and pepper

### FOR THE CÈPES:

4 oz. cèpes, sliced  
½ cup olive oil  
1½ tsp. sherry vinegar  
¼ tsp. garlic, minced  
Salt and pepper

### FOR THE GARNISH:

Parmesan  
Caper berries

To prepare the steak, heat 2 Tbs. olive oil in a frying pan until it's smoking hot. Season the flank steak, then sear for 1 min. each side. Chill the steak thoroughly. Slice straight down very thin. Arrange on plate and keep cold.

For the mushrooms, clean the pan, and then heat ½ cup oil and sauté the cèpes. Just before they're done, add the garlic and sauté another few seconds. Add the vinegar and season-

ings. Transfer the mixture to bowl and cool.

To assemble, place some mushrooms on the center of the carpaccio. With a vegetable peeler, shave Parmesan on top. Add the caper berries.

## PAILLARD OF FLANK STEAK

A paillard is a thin slice of meat that's pounded and then grilled. This is a great dish when you need something quick but satisfying. We all have to rush home occasionally to make a spectacular dinner for two or more. The flank steak and shallot sauce take only a few minutes to prepare and cook. We serve it with crispy french fries. To drink with this meal, we'd choose a big wine that would hold up well with the sauce and french fries, such as a peppery zinfandel. *Serves four.*

### FOR THE PAILLARD:

2 lb. flank steak, trimmed  
Olive oil

### FOR THE SAUCE:

4 Tbs. butter  
1 oz. shallots, sliced  
1½ tsp. parsley, chopped  
1 Tbs. lemon juice



To prepare the steak, hold your knife at a low angle, about 20°, and slice the flank steak across the grain into pieces about ¼ in. thick. You will end up with slices the width of your steak and about 4½ in. long. Pound them with a mallet until they're ⅛ in. thick. Brush with olive oil.

To make the sauce, melt the butter in a frying pan. Add the shallots and sauté until golden brown. Add the parsley and lemon juice, stir, and then remove from heat. Grill the paillards for 30 seconds each side. If serving with french fries, arrange them on each plate first. Then place the paillards, season them with salt and pepper, and pour the sauce over the steak.

Lissa Doumani and her husband, Hiroyoshi Sone, opened Terra in the Napa Valley town of St. Helena, California, in 1988. Doumani describes their food as a blend of southern French and northern Italian with Japanese influences. The couple met at Spago in Los Angeles, where they worked as chefs before opening their own restaurant. ♦

*The less it's cooked, the tenderer it will be.*

*Because flank steak comes from a much-used muscle, it needs careful treatment to keep it from becoming rubbery or flavorless.*

*This variation of carpaccio uses two of the authors' recommendations for preventing toughness: cook flank steak only briefly—in this recipe, hardly at all—and slice it very thin (see recipe, above left).*





#### HOMEMADE—AND WORTH THE EFFORT.

*Brew beers to suit your taste, from caramel-colored pale ales to dark, full-bodied stouts and crisp, golden Pilsners. High-quality ingredients and inexpensive equipment now available to the home brewer make it easy to brew your own great-tasting beer.*

# Homebrew

Making your own distinctive beers is easier than you think

BY DAVID RUGGIERO

From the beginning of Prohibition in 1919 until 1979, when the last remnants of the Volsted Act were repealed, home brewing was illegal in the United States. Prohibition's legacy to beer brewing was the loss of a traditional craft, and thereafter American beer drinkers were restricted to uniformly over-carbonated, under-flavored brews. But home brewing, something your grandparents' grandparents probably did, is coming back.

Nearly one and a half million people now make all kinds of beer—bock, stout, brown ale, Pilsner—in kitchens and basements across America. As a brewing instructor, I've taught many people to make beer easily and economically. They've discovered that making their own beer, seeing it evolve and helping it mature, is satisfying and rewarding work.

Making beer is a simple four-step process. First the malted-barley sugars, hops, and water are boiled to sterilize the ingredients, to release the bitter resins and aromatic oils in the hops, and to clarify the beer. Second, this liquid, or *wort*, is chilled, fed yeast, and transferred to a covered container where the yeast ferments sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Next, the beer is primed with sugar and put into bottles. Finally, the beer is left to carbonate and to let the flavor mature.

All the ingredients and equipment needed to make beer are available at brewing-supply stores. Plan to spend between \$50 and \$100 to start home brewing, and then \$20 to \$30 per 5-gallon batch once you're set up.

#### FOUR ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Dark or light, sweet or bitter, all beers have four ingredients in common.

**Malted barley.** Barley is the backbone of beer. It provides the sugars that are fermented into alcohol. Other grains could be used, but historically barley has been preferred because it gives beer great flavor and body, and, frankly, it makes lousy bread.



Before barley can be used in beer, it must first be malted; that is, the barley grains are sprouted and then dried. This process activates natural enzymes that convert starch into sugar. Next the malted barley is steeped in hot water, or mashed, which speeds up the conversion of starch into sugar and draws the sugar out into solution. Malted-barley sugar is available in thick, syrupy extract or dry malt powder.

**Hops.** When beer is fermented, most, but not all, of the malted-barley sugar is converted into alcohol. The residual sugar makes the beer sweet. Bitter hops, the cone-shaped flowers of the hop vine, balance the sweetness of the beer. They also help stabilize the flavor, retain a good head, and preserve the beer. The wonderful floral aromas of many styles of beer come from the hops, too.

**Yeast.** Yeast is the most important ingredient, because yeast, not the brewer, actually makes beer. Live yeast organisms feed on the malted-barley sugar and produce alcohol and carbon dioxide as by-products. The brewer's job is to set up the best possible conditions for the yeast to live in.

Temperature is critical. Two types of yeast are used in beermaking—ale and lager. Ale yeast ferments beer best at temperatures from 55° to 70°F, while lager yeasts like temperatures from 32° to 55°. I recommend starting with an ale yeast because unless you have a refrigerator that you want to dedicate to beer, it's easier to find a spot in your house that's 55° to 70°. Pick one brand of ale yeast and stick with it. Change recipes, change malts, change hops, but use the same yeast until you get to know how it acts, how long it takes to ferment the beer, and how it's affected by temperature changes. It helps to keep a log of temperatures and fermenting time.

**Water.** I don't think that you should get too particular about the water you use. If your water at home is clean and has no strong flavor or odor, then use it. It's helpful to know how hard your water is, that is, what its mineral content is. Many styles of beer require hard water, and most water throughout the United States is soft. That's why beer recipes, like the one for pale ale, call for added minerals.

## THE EQUIPMENT

Brewing is the first step in the process of making beer. To brew beer you need a stove, a large kettle (at least 4 gallons), a large spoon, and a timer.

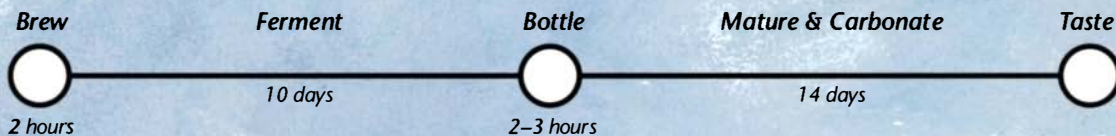


### TO BREW:

Steep crushed malted barley in 2 gallons of water. Bring the water to a boil, and add the malt extract. During the 60-minute boil, add the bittering hops and, later, the aromatic hops.

### BEERMAKING

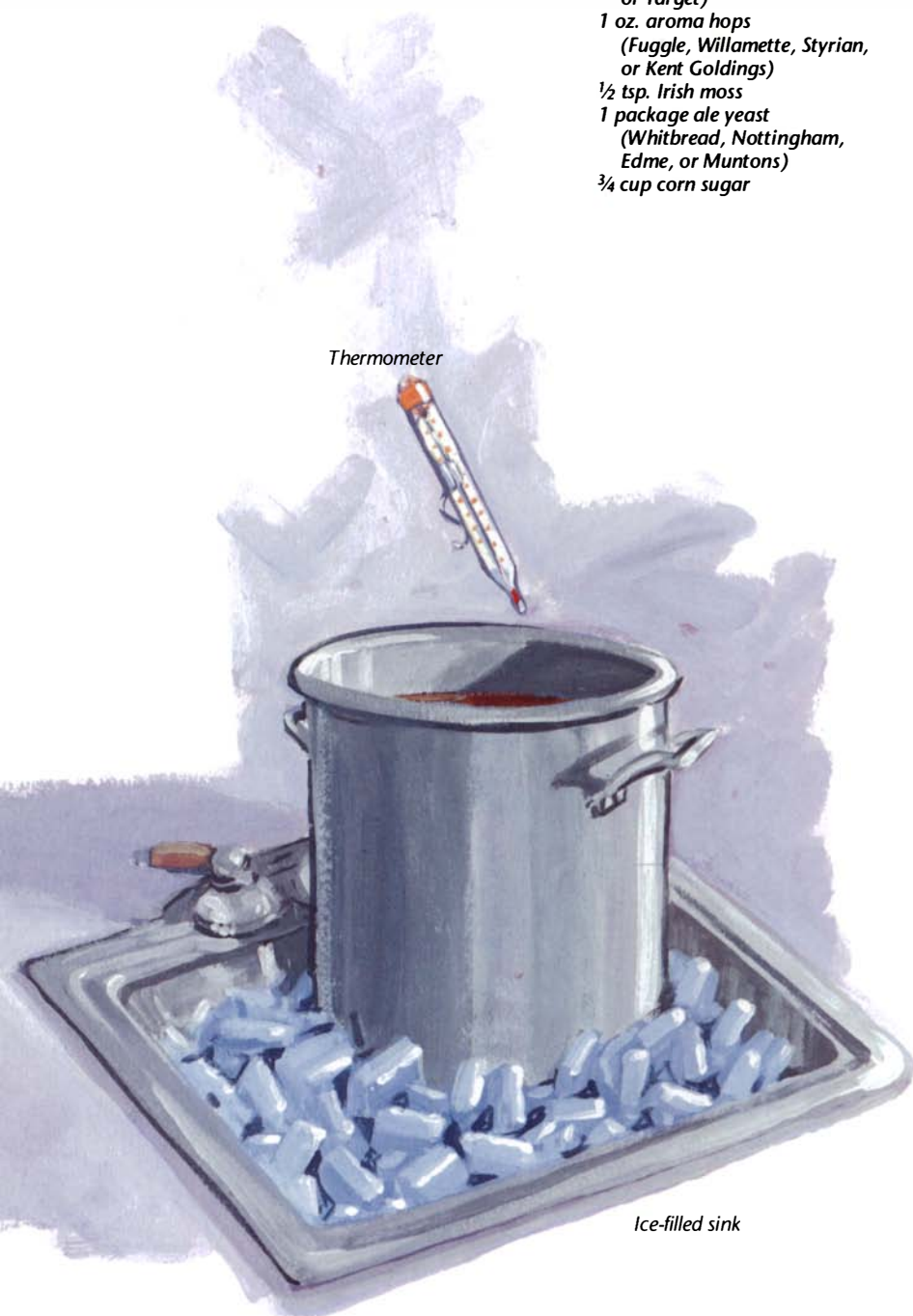
is a simple four-step process that takes about 4 hours of work over a 3½-week period.



## ENGLISH PALE ALE

Makes fifty-two 12-ounce bottles

6 lb. pale liquid malt extract  
½ lb. English Crystal malted barley  
1 Tbs. gypsum  
1 oz. bittering hops  
(Bullion, Northern Brewer,  
or Target)  
1 oz. aroma hops  
(Fuggle, Willamette, Styrian,  
or Kent Goldings)  
½ tsp. Irish moss  
1 package ale yeast  
(Whitbread, Nottingham,  
Edme, or Muntons)  
¾ cup corn sugar



### CHILL

Quickly chill the boiled beer down to 75°F before you add the yeast.

For fermenting you'll need a 6- to 7-gallon airtight container, an air lock, and a thermometer. You can use either a plastic bucket or a glass container. The container *must* be 1 to 2 gallons larger than the volume of beer you're making to leave room for the carbon-dioxide head. The air lock provides a vapor barrier that prevents bacteria from contaminating the beer. It also allows carbon dioxide to escape.

To bottle the beer, you'll want bottles, of course, a tube to get the beer into the bottles, a bottle capper and caps, and a large container in which to prime the beer. A bottling bucket with a spigot at the bottom and a spring-release bottle filler, though not essential, make bottling much easier.

### KEEPING THINGS CLEAN

I can't overstate the importance of clean equipment. Most off-tastes in beer are the result of inadequate sanitation. Beer becomes contaminated either by contact with unsterile equipment or with air.

Get in the habit of cleaning your equipment right after use. Then, before using it again, sterilize it with a weak solution of household bleach (1 tablespoon per 5 gallons) or a commercial cleaner and sterilizer like B-Brite or SDP-Chempro. Soak the equipment in the cleaner for 10 to 15 minutes and rinse thoroughly with hot water. Clean bottles can be sterilized in the dry cycle in a dishwasher.

### MAKING ENGLISH PALE ALE

Although I offer one of my favorite pale-ale recipes as a model, keep in mind that most beers are made essentially the same way. Hop aroma and bitterness dominate in this ale, while residual malt sugars add body and a hint of sweetness. Adding caramel-colored Crystal malt barley along with pale malt extract produces a beautiful copper-colored beer. The flavor and aroma suggest butterscotch.

### BREWING

Harden the water by dropping the gypsum into 2 gallons of cold water in your brew pot. The water will be cloudy for 5 to 10 minutes while the gypsum dissolves. If you know the mineral content of your water exceeds 300 parts per million, skip this step.

**Steep the Crystal malt** in the water to give color and flavor. First coarsely crush the Crystal malt with a grain mill or rolling pin and add it to the water. I like to make a big tea bag by putting the crushed grain in a muslin bag. Slowly heat the water, and take special care to remove the grain before the water starts to boil. If your timing is off and you boil the Crystal malt, you'll get dry, harsh flavors.

**Add the malt extract** to the boiling water. Stir vigorously until the malt dissolves. Stirring ensures that the malt doesn't settle to the bottom of the pan and burn. When the wort is boiling again, set the



timer for 60 minutes. Soon you'll see small white flakes of coagulated protein floating in the wort.

**Add the bittering hops** 10 minutes into the boil. Keep the wort boiling vigorously to extract the bitter resins from the hops.

**Add the Irish moss** to the brew pot at 30 minutes. Used exclusively as a clarifying agent, the moss bonds with malt proteins and clarifies the beer.

**Add half the aromatic hops** 50 minutes into the boil and the other half at 59 minutes. Too much heat and movement destroy the fragile aromatic oils of the hops. Short boil times are essential when imparting hop bouquet to a beer.

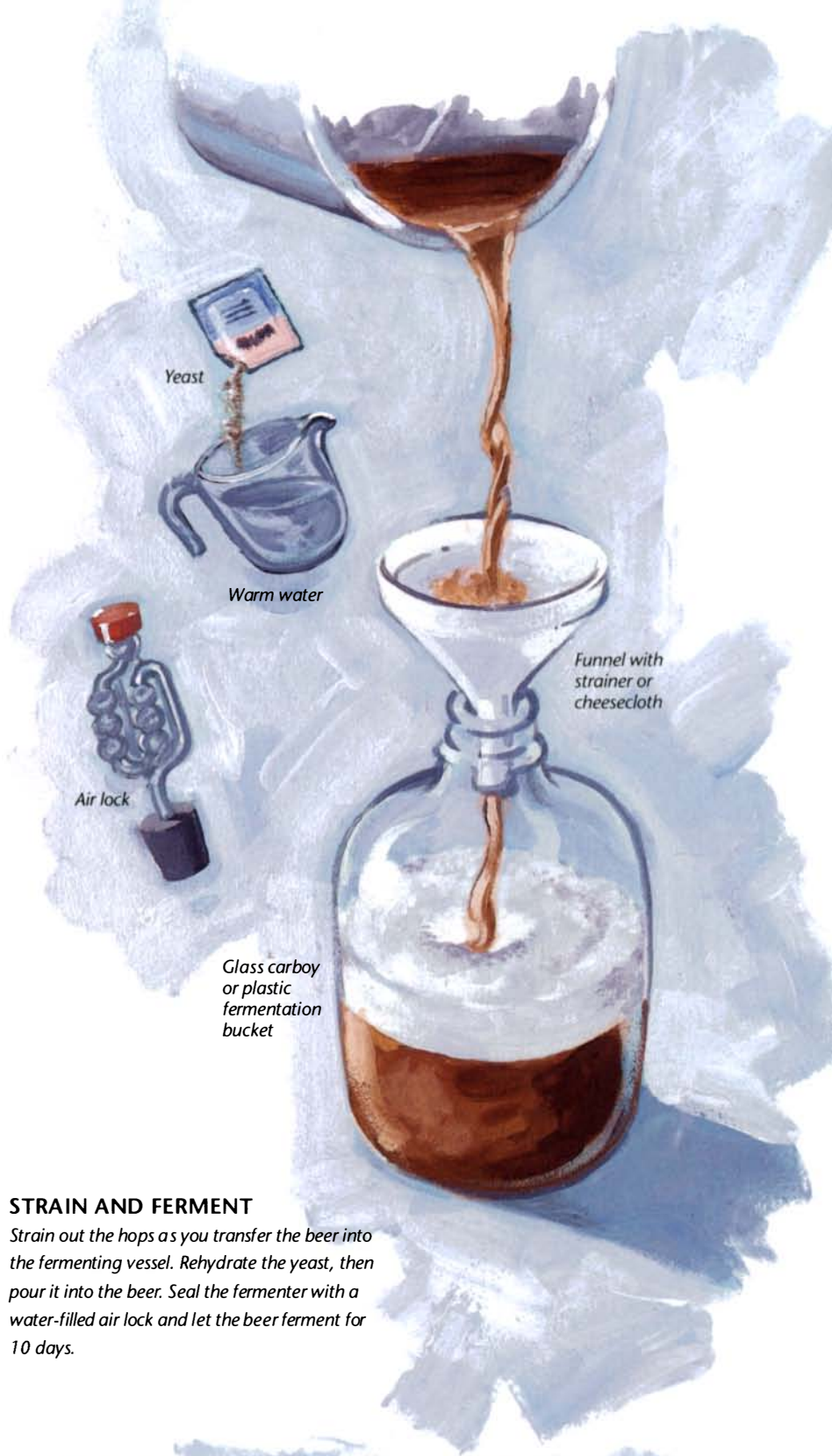
**Rehydrate the dry yeast.** Pour 1 cup of lukewarm (100° to 110°) tap water into a sterile glass. Sprinkle the yeast on top of the water, cover the glass with foil, and let it stand for 10 to 15 minutes. The mixture should bubble and release a bread-like aroma. If it does, you can use the yeast. If not, get some new yeast and repeat the procedure. It's better to find out now if the yeast is healthy and active than to wait until it's in the beer.

**Quickly cool the wort** to prevent bacterial contamination. Put ice and water in your sink and nestle the brew kettle into it. Stir the water to keep it circulating. When the wort is 120°, add enough cold water to bring it up to 5 gallons. You want to get the temperature down to 75° in less than an hour. The importance of these two procedures, rehydrating and chilling, cannot be overemphasized. They make the difference between good and superior beer.

**Strain and aerate the wort** while transferring it into the container in which the beer will ferment. The wort is rich in nutrients and sugar but lacks oxygen, which the yeast needs to grow. The surest way to introduce a sufficient amount of oxygen is to splash the wort around as you pour it into the fermenter. At the same time, strain the wort through a cheesecloth-lined colander to remove all the hops. Top off the wort to 5 gallons and check the temperature. When the wort is 75°, it's ready to ferment.

## FERMENTING

Pitch the yeast. This just means adding the yeast; no stirring is necessary. Seal the fermenter, attach the air lock, and fill it halfway with water. Put the fermenter in a place that has a constant temperature between 55° and 70° and where exposure to light and foot traffic is minimal. You'll see signs of fermentation in 6 to 12 hours. Escaping gas with a sweet aroma will bubble through the air lock. A thick brown foam, or *kraeusen*, will cover the top of the beer. In 2 to 4 days, the *kraeusen* will dissipate, signaling that the yeast has converted all the fermentable sugar into alcohol. The yeast will gradually settle to the bottom of the fermenter, clarifying the beer.



## STRAIN AND FERMENT

Strain out the hops as you transfer the beer into the fermenting vessel. Rehydrate the yeast, then pour it into the beer. Seal the fermenter with a water-filled air lock and let the beer ferment for 10 days.

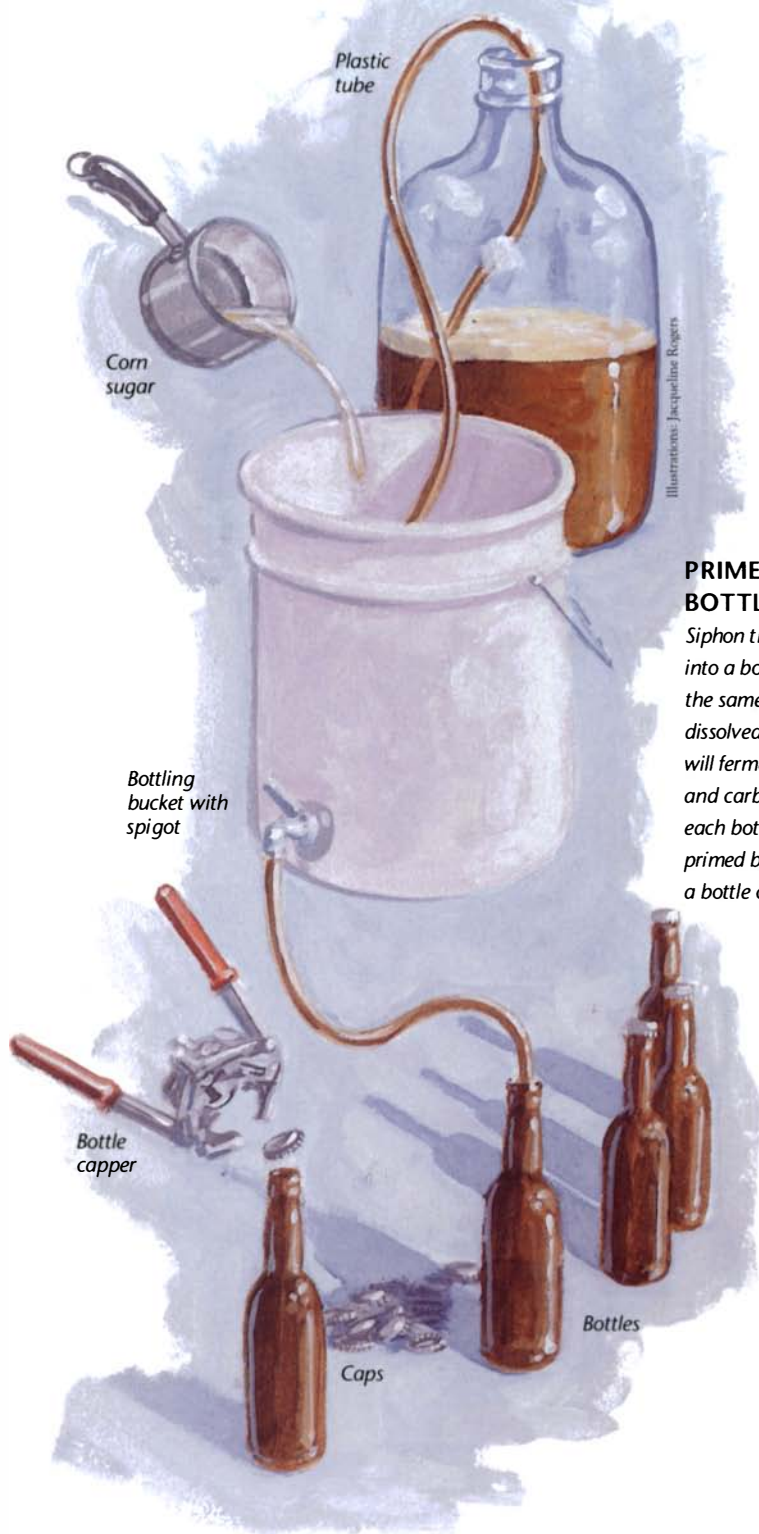
## EQUIPMENT YOU NEED TO MAKE BEER

**BREWING:**  
4- to 5-gallon kettle  
Long-handled spoon  
Timer  
Thermometer  
Strainer or funnel with cheesecloth

**FERMENTING:**  
6- to 7-gallon plastic bucket with cover or glass carboy with stopper  
Air lock  
Bleach or other sanitizer

**BOTTLING:**  
Siphon hose  
Bottle filler (optional)  
Bottling bucket with spigot (optional)  
52 12-ounce bottles (not screw-top)  
52 bottle caps  
Bottle capper





### PRIME AND BOTTLE

*Siphon the fermented beer into a bottling bucket. At the same time, pour in the dissolved corn sugar, which will ferment in the bottles and carbonate the beer. Fill each bottle with the primed beer, and seal with a bottle capper.*

### BOTTLING

About 10 days after you brew the beer, it should be ready to bottle. Remove a sample of the beer from the fermenter and examine it. It should look, smell, and taste like uncarbonated beer.

**Prime the beer** with corn sugar before siphoning it into the bottles. Priming feeds the beer with a small amount of sugar, which the yeast ferments in the bottle, carbonating the beer. You can use other types of sugar, like malt extract or brown sugar, but I prefer corn sugar because it doesn't change the beer's flavor and the yeast quickly converts it into carbon dioxide. Boil  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup corn sugar in 1 cup of water for 5 minutes, and then let the solution cool. Siphon the beer from the fermenter to a bottling bucket or any clean 6-gallon container. While the priming container is filling, add the sugar solution and gently stir the beer several times to distribute the corn sugar. The beer is now ready to be bottled.

**Siphon the primed beer** from the priming vessel into the bottles without agitating the beer. Raise the bucket high above the level of the bottles so that gravity will coax the beer into the bottles. Make sure you leave about 1 inch of air space between the beer and the top of the bottle; this is necessary for the beer to carbonate properly. Tightly seal new caps onto the bottles with a bottle capper.

**Waiting for the beer to mature and carbonate** is the hardest part. Most beers, including this pale ale, will be fully carbonated and ready to drink within two weeks. The beer still contains live yeast and will continually change. You may notice after a few months that your beer is different from when you first tasted it. It might get better or it might not. Rely on your own preference to guide you in deciding when the beer is ready to drink.

### ENJOYING THE BEER

Although you can serve ale on the cool side, I prefer to taste it first at room temperature to enjoy all the natural flavors and aromas. Decant the beer, leaving behind the yeast sediment that has settled to the bottom of the bottle. A dimpled pint glass is my choice for a pale ale because the large open top lets the beer's lacy head spread out; and the dimples refract the beer's luscious copper color.

As you bring the glass to your mouth, inhale deeply. You'll detect sweet malt and floral hop aromas. Hold the beer in your mouth for a moment. You'll notice that it stimulates many parts of your tongue and has a firm feel to it. Swallowing the beer and waiting for the aftertaste are all that remain.

### RESOURCES

To find a beer-supply store near you, look in the yellow pages under *Brewers' Equipment & Supplies* or *Beer Homebrewing Equipment & Supplies*; or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **Home Wine and Beer Trade Association**, 604 North Miller Rd., Valrico, FL 33594; 813/685-4261.

### For more information, contact:

**The American Homebrewers Association**, PO Box 1510, Boulder, CO 80306-1510; 303/447-0816. Publishes *zymurgy* magazine five times a year. Provides information on home brewing, homebrew clubs, and beer competitions.

*David Ruggiero is a nationally certified beer judge and has taught thousands of people to brew beer at his Newton, Massachusetts, brewing-supply store, Barley-malt and Vine. ♦*



# Baking a Leek Tart

Get hearty taste from a subtle onion  
and an enriched dough

BY GUDRUN RITER



Photos: Susan Kahn

**Golden crust and firm center.** The tart is baked for about 30 minutes until the crust is golden brown and the custard is no longer runny.

**Caraway seasoning.** The strong, spicy flavor of caraway seeds blends with the sweet leeks, smoky bacon, and rich cream in the custard topping.



Photos except where noted: Tina Riter

In the village where I grew up in Rheinland-Pfalz in southwestern Germany, the fare is simple and rustic. But it's an adaptable and variable cuisine. That's because our curious cooks love to peek into the cooking pots of our French neighbors, pilfer their recipes, adjust them to our own taste, and then call them *echt pfaelzisch*, or genuine pfaelzisch.

One of these adaptations is the leek tart, a flat yeast bread topped with a moist, creamy leek-and-bacon custard. I think of it as a hybrid of Alsatian Flammkuchen, quiche Lorraine, and German Zwiebelkuchen, or onion tart. Leek tarts remind me of my childhood: we'd eat them after the grape harvest with a tangy, fizzy, new, white *Federweisser* wine.

To make the soft, bread-like crust that's characteristic of German tarts, you simply add eggs, butter, and milk to enrich the yeast dough. The custard filling isn't difficult to make, but inattention at two points can ruin the topping. First, the leeks must be thoroughly cleaned so that no grit gets into the custard. Second, the cooked leeks, bacon, and cream must be cool when the eggs are added. Otherwise, the eggs cook immediately and make the custard lumpy.

Now that I live in California, I find many occasions to bake a leek tart. It's good warm or at room temperature. It makes a wonderful lunch dish,



*Rolling in place. The dough is rolled right in the baking sheet. You could roll the dough on a floured work surface and then transfer it to the sheet, but rolling in place saves a step and keeps the counter clean. The dishtowel under the pan prevents it from sliding around.*

### THE CRUST

1 cup milk  
2 eggs  
2 tablespoons butter  
½ teaspoon sugar  
½ teaspoon salt  
1 package dry yeast  
or cake of compressed yeast  
4 cups flour

### THE CUSTARD TOPPING

6 leeks  
½ pound bacon  
1 cup cream  
1 teaspoon caraway seeds  
Salt and pepper  
3 eggs  
1 egg yolk

served with a soup or green salad. My American friends enjoy it as a party food with a cool glass of Pilsner or a dry white wine, and my children like to take it to school for lunch.

### MAKING THE CRUST

Since a warm dough rises faster than a cool dough, you should warm the milk, eggs, and butter before putting them in the dough. Submerge the eggs in hot water for about 10 minutes. Heat the milk on the stove or in the microwave until it's lukewarm. Soften the butter by letting it sit at room temperature, or zap it for a few seconds in the microwave.

**Mix the batter.** Pour the milk in a large bowl and dissolve the sugar and salt in it. Sprinkle or crumble the yeast on top of the milk and wait 2 or 3 minutes for the yeast to rehydrate. I don't bother to proof the yeast before I add it. I check the package to make sure it hasn't passed its expiration date, and I've seldom had problems with the dough not rising. For cake yeast, I make sure it's moist and has a pleasant old-beer smell.

Add the eggs, the butter (cut into small pieces), and 1 cup of flour, and beat with a wooden spoon or an electric mixer. Add the second cup of flour and continue to stir. When the flour is absorbed, pour in the third cup. At this point, the dough will be stiff and heavy. Mix it with your hands, or if you're using an electric mixer, change to the dough hook. Gradually sprinkle on more flour and work it in until the



*Egg wash. Egg yolk painted on the rim varnishes the crust as it bakes. The crust's edges are raised to contain the custard filling.*

dough is no longer sticky and it pulls away from the sides of the bowl.

**Knead the dough** until it's smooth and satiny, which by hand takes about 15 to 20 minutes. For years, I always kneaded by hand to defy an old woman in my village who baked the most wonderful yeast breads. Once when I asked her the secrets of her breads, she said, "It's no use trying, girl. Young women don't have the patience to knead dough properly." Today, my defiance has given way to convenience, and I use the dough hook on my Kitchen-Aid mixer, which does the job in about 3 minutes.

**Let the dough rise.** After kneading, turn the dough over in a greased bowl. Cover and let it rise in a warm place until it doubles in size, which should take about an hour. Punch down the dough and knead it again briefly to release trapped air.

**Roll and shape the dough.** I like large, rectangular tarts, so I use a 12- by 18-inch baking sheet. You can make several small, round tarts or two pizza-size tarts with this recipe. Lightly oil whatever baking sheet you use to help brown the bottom of the crust and to prevent sticking.

Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface until it's slightly larger than the baking sheet and about ½-inch thick. Rolling is easier if you let the dough first sit for about 10 minutes to let the gluten relax. If your rolling pin fits inside your baking sheet, you can roll the dough directly on the sheet instead. Use your fingers to form a 1-inch-high lip around the rectangle so the liquid in the custard topping can't run out. Cover the baking sheet with a damp cloth and let the crust rise again in a warm place for 20 minutes.

### PREPARING THE CUSTARD TOPPING

I like the mild flavor of the leek, a relative of the onion. It has all the onion's flavoring attributes without the bite and the tears, but they are a nuisance to





**Getting the grit out.** Leeks often have dirt between their leaves. To clean a leek quickly, first slice halfway through the stem. Make sure you keep your fingers clear of the blade.

clean. To grow leeks with white, mild-tasting bulbs, the soil has to be mounded around the stems, and dirt usually lodges between the leaves. Whether you grow them or buy them, you'll find soil inside the folds.

**Clean and slice the leeks.** Cut off the roots, the bottom  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the stalk, and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the dark-green tops. Starting from the root end, cut lengthwise halfway through the stem. Now you can easily pull apart and fan out the leaves. Wash them under fast-running water. Holding them by the leaves, slice the leeks into thin rounds, about  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick. The white part is the more tender and flavorful part, so use all of it. I like to use a bit of the dark-green leaves to give the topping some color. If the leeks are particularly gritty, I'll wash them again after they're sliced, soaking them in two or three changes of water in a salad spinner, and then spin them dry.

**Fry the bacon and leeks.** Cut the bacon into small pieces, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch square, and fry it in a large pot until crisp. Then drain the bacon pieces on a paper towel and remove all but about 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pot. Sauté the leeks in the bacon fat over low heat for 3 to 5 minutes until the slices are soft. Put the bacon back in the pot with the leeks.

**Add cream, caraway, and seasoning.** Stir in the cream and caraway seeds and season with salt and pepper to taste. Simmer over low heat for about 5 minutes to blend in the smoky flavor of the bacon and the strong taste of the caraway seeds. Some people find the taste of caraway overbearing. I happen to love it, so I sometimes add even more than a teaspoon to my topping. If you don't like caraway, don't be discouraged from making leek tarts. They're delicious prepared with just salt and pepper as seasoning, or with a dash of nutmeg, mild paprika, or curry powder. Any flavoring that works well with onions will probably work well with leeks.

**Cool before adding the eggs.** When the cream has blended with the leeks, bacon, and caraway



*Pull the leek open and run it under water to flush out the dirt.*

seeds, let the mixture cool, and then stir in the eggs. It's very important not to add the eggs while the mixture is still hot, because they'll cook right away and make tough lumps. The topping is now ready to be spread onto the risen dough.

## BAKING THE TART

Brush the rim of the crust with a beaten egg yolk so that the exposed crust turns a rich brown as it bakes. Spread the topping on the crust and bake in a 350°F oven until the custard is set and the crust is golden brown, for 25 to 35 minutes.

## VARIATIONS

Although I often make this rich, thick-crust version, there are other ways to make a leek tart. For a lighter custard, I substitute milk for the cream and add another egg to the custard. The tart is also good without the custard—with just leeks, bacon, and caraway seeds. For a change of pace, I'll make it with a thin, pizza-like crust by leaving out the eggs and substituting water for the milk and oil for the butter. Or if I don't have time to wait for the yeast dough to rise, I'll bake the custard filling in a pastry crust.

*Everyone had a vegetable garden in the village where Gudrun Riter grew up in southwestern Germany. Now a landscape designer and recipe tester in Los Altos, California, Riter continues to grow and cook the vegetables prominent in German cuisine. ♦*



*If the leeks are particularly gritty, slice them for use and clean them in water in a salad spinner. Change the water a couple of times until there's no more dirt, and then spin them dry.*

# Putting Crunch in Sponge Cakes

Finish a plain cake with a mosaic of almonds, pecans, or pistachios

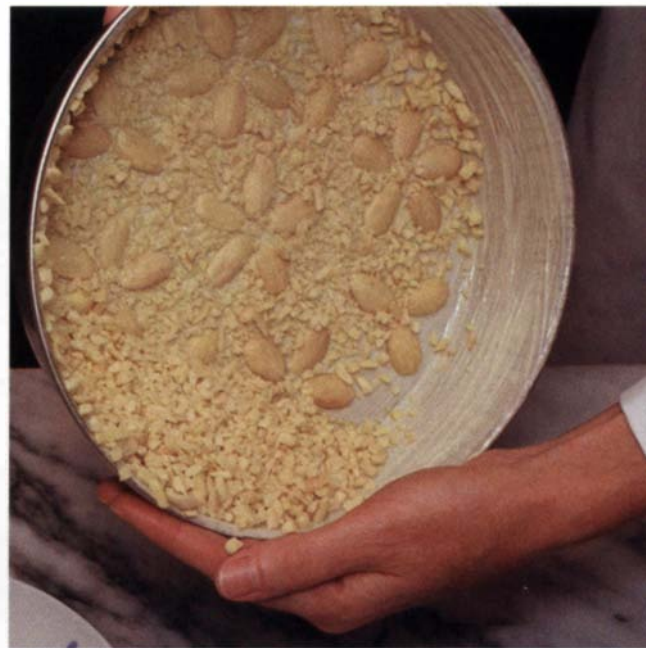
BY SUSAN LANTZIUS



*Slice the whole blanched almonds in half lengthwise with a very sharp knife. The almond halves are used to form a pattern in the pan, which gets baked into the surface of the sponge cake.*



*Arrange the almond halves in the buttered pan, forming a decorative flower pattern. The flower decoration will stand out on the finished cake.*



*Coat the bottom and sides of the pan with chopped almonds by rotating the pan in your hands. The chopped almonds adhere to the buttered pan, forming a backdrop for the flower pattern.*

Over the past twelve years as a pastry chef, I've created a lot of wicked desserts. Through it all I've remained a big fan of light and refreshing sponge cakes. Sponge cakes are a little too plain to serve on their own; however, by using a technique taught to me by Luciano Vismara, I found a great way to enhance them with a special nut decoration. Not only is this decoration beautiful, but also it brings a delightful flavor to the cake and adds a pleasant contrast of textures between the crunchiness of the surface and the softness of the interior.

## PREPARING THE PANS

This pan-decoration method consists of artfully ar-

ranging various nut halves in buttered cake pans, then filling in the spaces with finely chopped nuts, as shown in detail in the photos above. I have developed three cakes using different nuts and flavors. The first is an almond-and-lemon sponge cake (see the photo on p. 70). The other two, a pecan-and-chocolate cake and individual pistachio-and-orange cakes, are variations of the first.

**Butter the pans**—To make the almond-and-lemon sponge cake, I begin by using a pastry brush to coat the bottom and sides of a round cake pan heavily and evenly with very soft unsalted butter.

**Decorate with sliced almonds**—I slice the blanched almonds in half lengthwise with a very



sharp knife (see photo at far left). To make the pecan-and-chocolate-cake variation, I trim the pecan halves so that they lie flat (see photo on p. 71). Next, I place the almond halves, flat side down, in the buttered pans, arranging them in a pattern (as shown at left in center photo). Flower motifs are my favorite, but you may want to try geometric designs, or even create a picture of something, which is especially appealing to children. Keep in mind, however, that it will be easier to cut the finished cake if your pattern is formed in eight distinct sections, one for each slice, with a space left between each to accommodate your knife.



*Gently turn the cake pan over, allowing the excess chopped almonds to fall from the pan. An even layer of chopped almonds remains in the pan. The pan is now ready for the cake batter.*

**Coat the pan with chopped almonds**—I then place the chopped almonds in the decorated pan and tilt the pan sideways. With my right hand on the top side of the pan and my left hand on the bottom side, I slowly turn the pan clockwise, rolling the nuts around inside. The chopped almonds adhere to the butter on the bottom and sides of the pan, filling in all the spaces between the almond halves (see photo at near left). I carefully turn the pans upside down and let the excess chopped almonds fall out. The pan is now ready for the cake batter. If the kitchen is very warm, I put the prepared pan in the refrigerator to set the almonds into the butter.

The reasons I have chosen almonds, pecans, and pistachios for decoration are that almonds have a nice flat surface when cut in half, pecans have such an interesting shape, and pistachios have great color. Of course they all have exceptional flavor. You can try other varieties of nuts as I have done, but

keep in mind that nuts with a flat surface, such as almonds, are the easiest to decorate with. Oily nuts, such as macadamias, are pretty but a little too heavy when chopped, which means that they won't coat the pan as evenly as a drier variety of nut will.

### MAKING THE SPONGE-CAKE BATTER

Although this pan decoration may work for other types of cakes, I have had the most success with sponge cake because its batter will almost reach the rim of the pan and hold the nuts on the side of the pan. A butter-cake batter will only partially fill the cake pan; hence the nuts can slip down the sides before the batter has sufficiently risen.

You can use your favorite sponge-cake recipe, but I have developed the following recipes to complement each variety of nut used in the decoration. Each recipe includes the decorating nut in grated form in the cake batter. The batter for the almond-and-lemon cake, and its variations, is based on a type of sponge cake called *génoise*. *Génoise* was originally an Italian cake, which the French and we have borrowed. It's rich, moist, and very versatile. A basic *génoise* is made by whipping whole eggs with sugar until thick and then folding in all-purpose or cake flour and melted, cooled butter.

**Whip the eggs and sugar**—It's important to use room-temperature eggs when making the batter, because they will create more volume than cold ones and result in a lighter cake. Some pastry chefs heat the egg and sugar mixture to increase volume, but I find this unnecessary. For the following recipes, I use extra egg yolks in place of some of the whole eggs called for in a basic *génoise*. They add more flavor and give the cake a finer texture. I whip the eggs, yolks, and sugar with a heavy-duty mixer until the mixture is thick and forms a ribbon trail when the whip is lifted.

**Fold in the dry ingredients**—For the dry ingredients, I've chosen a mixture of cake flour and cornstarch to achieve the lightest sponge cake possible. I fold the dry ingredients into the beaten egg-and-sugar mixture as quickly and delicately as possible to avoid deflating the batter. The last step is folding in the butter, which can deflate the batter quickly. To minimize loss of volume, I remove about two cups of the batter, mix it with the butter, and fold this mixture into the rest of the batter.

### BAKING AND COOLING THE CAKE

As the sponge cake bakes, the almond decoration slowly roasts, forming a nut crust on the bottom and sides. I bake the cake for about thirty to forty minutes, until the top is golden brown and springs back when pressed with a finger. I then put the cake on a metal rack to cool it completely before unmolding it onto a serving plate. Unmolding the cake reveals



*A thick ribbon trail forms on the surface of the whipped egg-and-sugar mixture when the whip is lifted, indicating that the mixture has reached maximum volume.*

## SOURCES OF SUPPLY

**Bridge Kitchenware**  
(214 East 52nd St.,  
New York, NY 10022;  
212/838-6764)

stocks three- by two-  
inch tartlet pans with  
removable bottoms.  
Catalog available.

**Maison Glass** (111  
East 58th St., New  
York, NY 10022;  
212/755-3316)  
carries shelled,  
unsalted pistachio  
nuts. Free catalog.

**Sunnyland Farms,**  
Inc., (Albany, GA;  
800/999-2488) also  
carries shelled,  
unsalted pistachios.  
Free catalog.

the almond decoration over the entire surface of the cake. It's a dramatic moment.

## SERVING THE CAKE

At least an hour before serving, I brush the cake with a kirsch-flavored sugar syrup. This syrup adds moistness and flavor. The cake can be served on its own, or it can become an elegant dessert when paired with a fresh fruit salad or poached fruit compote. It's best to serve the cake the day it's baked.

Put the slivered almonds in a food processor fitted with the blade attachment and pulse 40 to 50 times or until the almonds are finely chopped.

Put the chopped almonds in a medium-fine sieve and sift them over a piece of waxed paper, letting the ground almonds fall through the sieve. You should have  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 cup of chopped almonds and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of ground almonds. Reserve the ground almonds.

Put the chopped almonds in the prepared pan and gently roll the pan, coating the bottom and sides with the almonds. Gently turn the pan upside down to remove any excess chopped almonds.



*Lemon-and-almond sponge cake is soft and lemon flavored on the inside and crunchy with roasted almonds on the outside.*

## LEMON SPONGE CAKE IN A ROASTED-ALMOND CRUST

A delectable sponge cake flavored with lemon, vanilla, and kirsch, hidden under a layer of golden-brown almonds. Serves eight.

### GÉNOISE:

1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened  
1¼ oz. (20) whole blanched almonds  
6 oz. (1¼ cups) slivered almonds  
½ tsp. grated lemon zest  
2¼ oz. (½ cup plus 1 Tbs.) cake flour  
2 oz. (¼ cup plus 2 Tbs.) cornstarch  
2 eggs  
5 egg yolks  
5 oz. (½ cup plus 2 Tbs.) sugar  
½ tsp. vanilla  
1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled

### SUGAR SYRUP:

2 oz. (¼ cup) water  
2 oz. (¼ cup) sugar  
1 tsp. kirsch, or to taste

**Prepare the pan.** Position the rack in the lower third of the oven and heat to 325°F. Butter the bottom and sides of a 9- by 2-in. round cake pan well with the softened butter. Cut the almonds in half lengthwise and place them, flat side down, in the cake pan to form a decorative pattern.

**Make the sponge cake.** Grate the yellow lemon zest first, making sure not to get any of the white pith. In a medium bowl, sift the flour, cornstarch, and reserved ground almonds. In the 4½-quart bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer with the wire whip attachment, beat the eggs and yolks until blended.

Gradually add the sugar and continue beating until the mixture is pale yellow and leaves a thick ribbon trail when the whip is lifted (see photo on p. 69), 10 to 15 min. Beat in the vanilla and lemon zest.

Using a large rubber spatula, gently fold a third of the flour mixture into the beaten eggs. Gently fold in the remaining flour mixture, a third at a time.

Put about 2 cups of the batter in a medium bowl and gently fold in the melted, cooled butter. Return the mixture to the rest of batter and fold just until combined.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 30 to 40 min. Cool the cake completely in the pan on a wire rack.

**Make the sugar syrup.** In a small saucepan, combine the water and sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until the sugar dissolves. Raise the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. Cool the syrup to room temperature. Stir in the kirsch.

**Unmold the cake.** Invert the cake onto a flat serving plate and brush it with the kirsch syrup.





*Pecans decorate the pan for a chocolate sponge-cake variation. The prepared pan is now ready to be filled with batter and baked. While baking, this pecan decoration will roast to make a pretty and delicious surface to the finished cake.*



*Slice the pecan halves so that the flatter side is as level as possible. This will make a smooth surface on the top of the finished cake.*



*Individual pistachio-and-orange cakes are decorated with confectioners' sugar and topped with a whole pistachio, which is secured with a dab of melted white chocolate.*

### **CHOCOLATE SPONGE CAKE IN A ROASTED-PECAN CRUST**

This is a variation of the lemon-and-almond sponge cake, using cocoa powder as part of the dry ingredients and pecan halves as decoration. I prefer to use a Dutch-processed cocoa, such as Droste or Van Houten, which gives the cake a rich, dark color and a delicious chocolate flavor. *Serves eight.*

Follow the recipe for Lemon Sponge Cake in a Roasted-Almond Crust but make the following changes:

1. Replace the whole and slivered almonds with 7¼ oz. (1¾ cups) pecan halves.
2. Replace 3 Tbs. of the cornstarch with cocoa powder.
3. Increase the sugar to ¾ cup.
4. Omit the lemon zest.
5. Replace the kirsch in the sugar syrup with Frangelica.

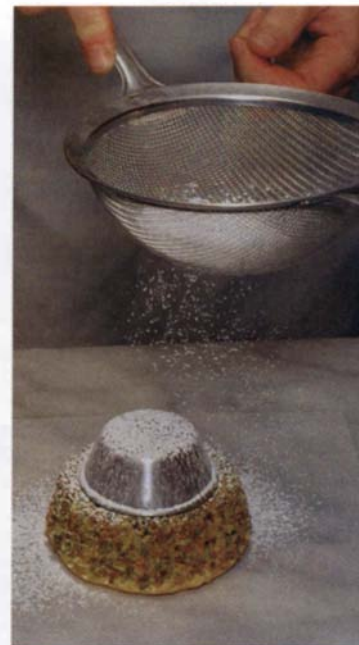
### **INDIVIDUAL ORANGE SPONGE CAKES IN A ROASTED-PISTACHIO CRUST**

These cakes are a variation of the lemon-and-almond sponge cake and have an appealing bright-green color. Pistachio nuts imported from Turkey and Afghanistan are smaller than those grown in California and have a brighter color. *Serves eight.*

Follow the recipe for the Lemon Sponge Cake in a Roasted-Almond Crust but make the following changes:

1. For the whole and slivered almonds, substitute 7 oz. (1½ cups) unsalted pistachio nuts, shelled and skinned. If you use salted pistachios, blanch them in boiling water for 30 seconds to remove the salt. Dry them in a 300°F oven for 5 min. and let cool.
2. Replace the lemon zest with 1 Tbs. orange zest.
3. Replace the kirsch in the sugar syrup with an orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier.
4. Replace the 9- by 2-in. cake pan with eight 3- by 2-in. tartlet pans. If they have removable bottoms, hold the bottoms in place with a finger while turning the nut-coated pans upside down (refer to photo on p. 69).
5. Reduce the baking time to 15 min.
6. Dust cakes with ¼ cup confectioners' sugar.
7. Attach pistachios to cake with 1 oz. white chocolate.

**Decorate the cakes**—Once you have brushed the syrup on the cakes, let them sit for 1 hour to absorb the syrup. On the top of each cake, center an upside-down round tartlet pan measuring about ½ in. less in diameter than the top of each cake. Put ¼ cup confectioners' sugar in a fine sieve and dust each cake lightly with the sugar (as shown in photo at right). Melt the white chocolate over hot (not simmering) water and cool to room temperature. Dip the bottom of each whole pistachio into the melted chocolate and place it in the middle of a cake. The white chocolate holds the pistachio on the cake and should be barely visible.



*Dust the pistachio-and-orange cakes with confectioners' sugar. The tartlet mold on top of the cake is then removed, leaving a decorative ring of sugar around the edge of the cake.*

*Susan Lantzius is a graduate of La Varenne cooking school and worked as a pastry chef in New York City for twelve years, most recently at San Domenico. She is the editorial assistant for Fine Cooking. ♦*



In this department, experts define cooking terms and describe basic techniques. Where needed, they supply foundation recipes and, where appropriate, variations.

## Preparing Crayfish



Removing meat from cooked crayfish. First, gently pull the head of the crayfish from the tail.



Hold the tail securely in one hand and, with the other, remove the top ring of shell from the body.



Pinch the bottom end of the tail and pull out the meat with the other hand.

Crayfish are fresh-water crustaceans that look like tiny lobsters and weigh from one to three ounces. They're found everywhere in the world but Africa. In the United States, they're especially abundant and popular in Louisiana, and other parts of the Deep South, where they're called crawfish. Today, much of the world's crayfish supply is farm-raised.

Like shrimp, crayfish have an intestinal vein that runs down their back that can be bitter and gritty. Wild crayfish may be deveined before cooking, but farm-raised crayfish are purged before being sold, and so deveining usually isn't necessary.

For crayfish to be served in the shell, devein them before cooking. Hold the crayfish body firmly in one hand, and then with the other hand, twist the central flange on the tail and pull gently. The dark intestine will follow.

To cook crayfish, boil them in their shells for six to eight minutes, or steam them for ten to fourteen minutes.

To extract the meat from the shell, separate the head from the tail, as shown in the top photo at left. Peel the top ring of shell from the tail, as shown in the middle photo. Pinch the end of the tail and gently pull the meat out in one piece (see bottom photo). The intestinal vein can be removed at this stage, if you like.

## Vinaigrette Dressings

A vinaigrette is an emulsion made in its simplest form from oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper. A little Dijon mustard is often included as well. The most common use for vinaigrette has long been as a dressing for salads, but the use of vinaigrettes, both hot and cold, as a dressing for meat and vegetables, is on the rise. So are vinaigrettes that are constructed around puréed vegetables, such as shallots. The ingredients are whisked together until emulsified, forming a creamy sauce. The ratio of vinegar to oil is generally one part vinegar to three parts oil. If lemon juice is used in place of the vinegar, the amount of lemon juice should be increased to create a good balance. (Lemon juice is less acidic than most vinegars.)

Many different oils and vinegars can be combined to make a variety of vinaigrettes. Vinegars and oils vary in strength

of flavor, so it's important to taste the mixture and regulate the amount of vinegar to oil to reach a pleasing balance of flavor. Vinaigrettes made with nut oils should be balanced so the nutty flavor stands out; use a little less vinegar.

Variations on the basic vinaigrette can also be made by adding different types of mustard, various chopped herbs, minced shallots, or crushed garlic.

Some vinaigrettes don't remain emulsified for very long, but they can be mixed again to re-emulsify just before tossing with the salad to ensure even distribution of flavor. Adding mustard or mayonnaise will help to stabilize the emulsion, but the main reason to add these ingredients is for their flavor and texture.

A basic vinaigrette can be stored for up to a week at room temperature. Vinaigrettes with fresh herbs should be stored for no more than two to three days.

### BASIC VINAIGRETTE

Makes 1 cup.

*1/4 cup red- or white-wine vinegar*  
*1 Tbs. Dijon mustard*  
*1/4 tsp. salt, or to taste*  
*1/8 tsp. pepper, or to taste*  
*3/4 cup olive oil, vegetable oil or a combination*

In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, salt, and pepper. Whisking constantly, add the oil in a slow, steady stream until completely incorporated. Place the bowl on a potholder or folded dishtowel to keep the bowl from spinning while you whisk.

### VINAIGRETTE VARIATIONS

All variations make about a cup.

**Champagne and black peppercorn**—Substitute two tablespoons champagne vinegar for the red-wine vinegar. Substitute two tablespoons mayonnaise for the Dijon mustard. Use two teaspoons crushed whole black peppercorns in place of the pepper. To crush peppercorns, place them on a cutting board, and with the bottom of a small, heavy saucepan, press down on them until they're broken in small pieces. Add a teaspoon of minced shallots.

**Lemon and chive**—Substitute one-third of a cup fresh lemon juice for the vinegar, and add a quarter cup of chopped fresh chives.

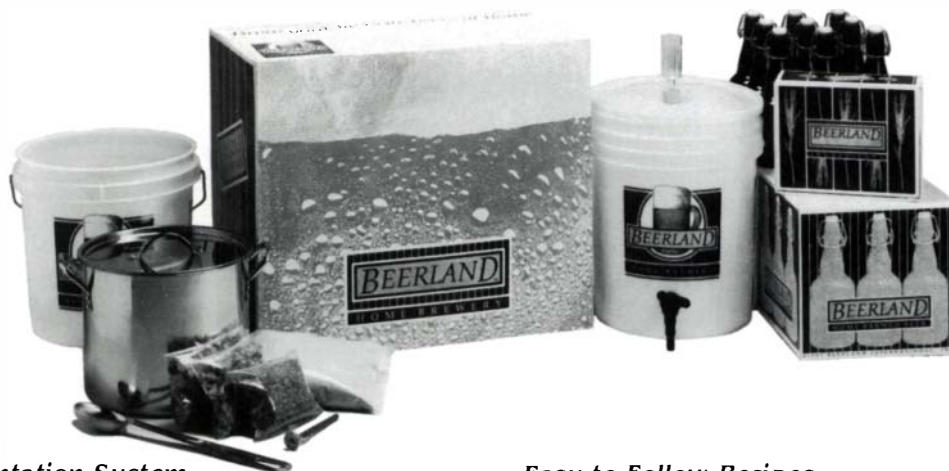
**Fresh herb**—Add three tablespoons chopped fresh herbs, such as parsley, tarragon, dill, or thyme.

(Continued)



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**Honey mustard**—Substitute a tablespoon of honey mustard for the Dijon mustard. Add a tablespoon chopped fresh herbs (see fresh-herb variation, above) and three tablespoons of tomato ketchup.

**Basil**—Add a small clove of garlic, minced, and half a cup of packed fresh basil leaves. Put all the ingredients in a food processor or blender and blend until smooth.

## Chicken Broth

Chicken broth is often confused with chicken stock. While the two use similar ingredients and are often interchangeable, there are important differences. Where broth uses chicken meat in its preparation, stock uses chicken bones, or a combination of bones and parts. Broth is a clear, full-flavored liquid generally served as a soup, with a few additions or garnishes, so a more pronounced flavor is desired. Chicken stock, on the other hand, is a base from which other dishes are made. It has a milder flavor than chicken broth, so as not to overpower the other flavors of the sauce or dish.

Another difference between the liquids is their consistencies. Chicken stock is a more full-bodied liquid because of the gelatin released by the large quantity of chicken bones. The fuller body of a stock isn't necessary for soup but is all-important in sauce-making because it adds richness.

Broth can be made from other poultry besides chicken (such as turkey), from beef, veal, or vegetables, or from a combination of several of these ingredients. In this country, many soups, such as classic chicken soup, are based on broths. In Italy, broth is referred to as *brodo*, and in France, *bouillon*. (Don't confuse the French term for broth with bouillon cubes, which are concentrated stock cubes. They tend to be very salty and therefore aren't a good substitute for broth.)

To make a chicken broth, put a whole chicken weighing about three pounds into a large pot. Include the gizzard, neck, and heart but not the liver, which would give the broth a bitter flavor. Instead of a whole chicken, you can use an equal weight of chicken backs, necks,



*Skimming is essential to good broth. Skim off all scum from the simmering liquid to produce a clear, flavorful broth. A flat, perforated spoon is ideal, but a regular metal spoon works well, too.*

and trimmings, including gizzards and hearts. Add two peeled and quartered onions, four carrots and four ribs of celery (both scrubbed and cut in two-inch pieces), a tablespoon of whole black peppercorns, and a *bouquet garni*, which is made by tying together with string several parsley sprigs, one or two sprigs fresh thyme, and one bay leaf. Add cold water to cover. Add only a little salt at this point, because as the liquid cooks and reduces, the salt becomes more pronounced. Bring the liquid to a boil and then immediately reduce the heat to low so that the liquid gently simmers. At this point, scum will rise to the surface. Skim off the scum with a spoon or skimmer (see photo, above) and discard it. Much of the scum can be removed at this early stage, though not all, so skim occasionally as the broth cooks. Skimming is vital to the clarity of the finished broth.

Cooking time for chicken broth varies from two to three hours. As the broth cooks, add enough water to keep the ingredients covered. If you use a whole chicken, remove it as soon as it's cooked (after about one hour). Cool the chicken slightly (so it's easier to handle), cut off the meat, and return the carcass to the pot. You can leave the meat on the chicken during the whole cooking process, but it will be overcooked and will render most of its flavor to the broth.

Strain the finished broth through a fine sieve—a conical sieve is ideal. If you don't have a sieve with a very fine mesh, first strain the broth through any strain-

er, and then pass it through a sieve lined with a double thickness of paper towel. You'll have to change the paper towels several times, as they become coated with impurities and restrict the flow of the broth.

Broth should be defatted before serving. If you have time, refrigerate it until it's completely cold. The fat will rise to the surface and harden; it's then easy to remove it with a spoon. If you don't have time to chill the broth, remove as much fat as possible from the surface with a ladle, and then drag a paper towel over the surface to absorb the remaining fat (see Tips, p. 10).

Broth will keep in the refrigerator for a week but must be brought to a boil after three days. It can also be frozen for several months.

*Basics recipes were developed by Abigail Johnson Dodge, a food consultant from Fairfield, Connecticut.*

## Matching Fats to Cooking Methods

You'll find a wide assortment of cooking fats and oils in supermarkets today, from butter and margarine in the dairy case, to solid vegetable shortening in the baking section, to a longline of vegetable oils stacked next to the vinegars. Chemically speaking, all are fats and have about 120 calories a tablespoon. Those that are liquid at room temperature are called oils. Made from grains, vegetables, fruits, and nuts, they're low in saturated fats and



contain no cholesterol. The fats made from animal products, such as butter and lard, contain cholesterol and are high in saturated fats. Shortening and margarine are vegetable oils that are made to be solid at room temperature through hydrogenation. They have more cholesterol-forming saturated fats than the oil from which they were made.

In cooking, fats transfer heat from the pan to the food being cooked. While nutrition is an important consideration when choosing a cooking oil or fat, all fats don't act alike when put on the stove. Deciding which fat to use should be based primarily on cooking method.

Fats can be heated to between 300° and 500°F, depending on the type, before they start to smoke and break down.

High heat		
Medium heat		Good for stir-frying and deep-frying
Low heat	Good for sautéing and pan-frying	
Good for gentle cooking and baking		
Butter	Olive oil	Peanut oil
Margarine	Lard	Sunflower oil
Vegetable shortening	Coconut oil	Corn oil
Toasted sesame oil		Canola oil
		Safflower oil

When a fat reaches its smoke point and begins to change chemically, not only does it create smelly fumes, but it also produces foul-tasting substances. Food cooked in fat that has been heated past its smoke point will be ruined. More seriously, overheated oil easily catches fire. Therefore, it's important to choose a fat that has a smoke point well above the temperature at which you'll be cooking.

Butter, margarine, and vegetable shortening can't be heated much higher than 300° before they smoke, making

them suitable only for gentle cooking or baking. Olive oil doesn't smoke until it reaches 375° to 400°, and so can be used for sautéing and pan-frying. Expensive nut oils, such as walnut and hazelnut, are not often used for cooking because their delicate flavors dissipate with heat. Most vegetable oils, such as corn, safflower, and peanut, have smoking points over 400° and can be used for all cooking methods. These oils are especially good for deep-frying, which requires temperatures as high as 375°.

Smoke points vary from brand to brand and are affected by use, age, and storage. Contact with air and food particles and exposure to light and high temperatures lower a fat's smoke point. To prolong the life of your fat, strain after each use and store in an airtight container away from light. The refrigerator is an ideal spot.

—Donna Shields, MS, RD, is a nutrition and culinary consultant in Clinton Corners, New York and an adjunct instructor at the Culinary Institute of America. ♦



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# Nutmeg and Mace



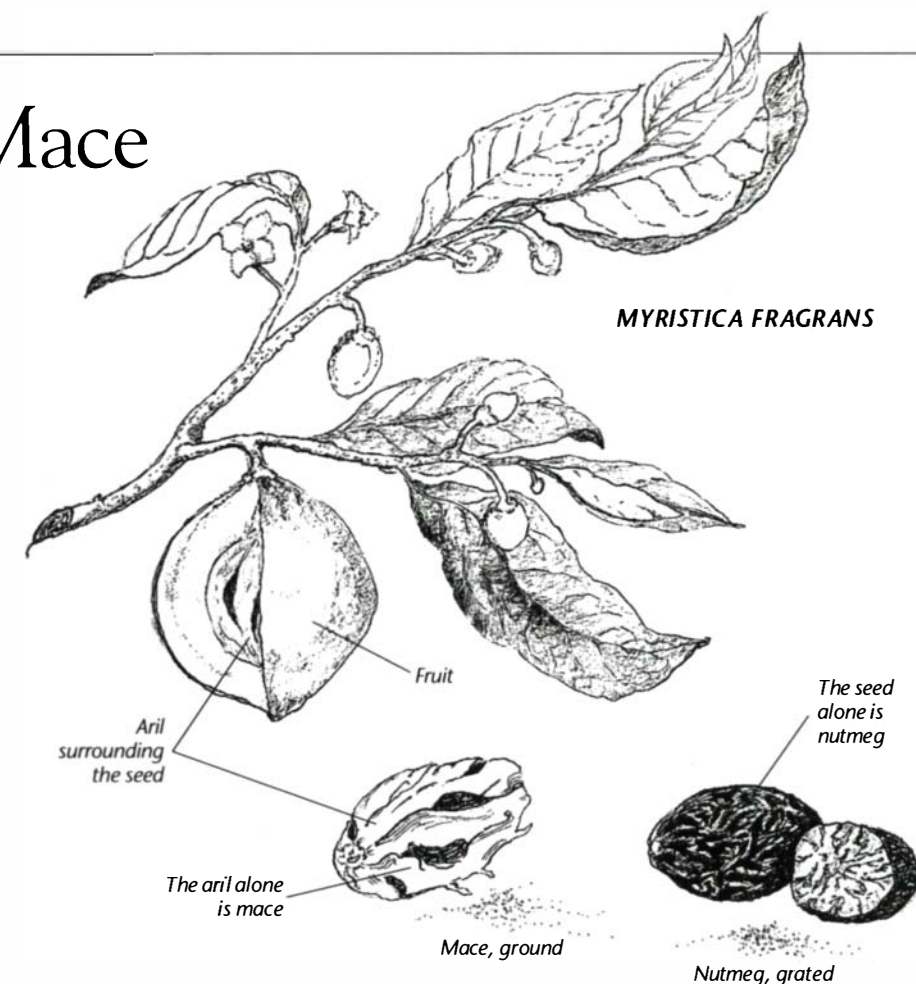
Freshly harvested nutmegs, still encased by their bright-red seed covering, which is mace.

Nutmeg is my favorite spice. Its warm aromatic fragrance is always reassuring, reminding me of favorite childhood foods, such as eggnog, baked custard, and applesauce. Nutmeg (from the Old French *nois muscade* for “musky nut”) has a most compelling, distinctive flavor.

Nutmeg and mace come from the same plant—*Myristica fragrans*—a fragrant evergreen tree that can grow sixty feet tall with long, leathery, simple leaves and small yellow flowers. Nutmeg is the small brown seed at the heart of the fruit; it's protected by a lacy, waxy, red-to-scarlet-to-yellow membrane (called an aril), which is mace. Native to the East Indian Molucca Islands, nutmeg and mace are cultivated broadly in the tropics, year-round, and recently cultivation has spread to the West Indies and Latin America.

Both spices are highly aromatic, and are usually sun- or charcoal-dried to develop their warm, sweet, spicy qualities. Four hundred pounds of nutmeg are required to produce only one pound of mace. Fortunately, this isn't reflected in the price; they cost about the same.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, spices were prized as preservatives and as flavoring to mask strong tastes of meats and fish past their prime. The aromatic, savory, and piquant qualities of spices made many foods more



enticing, and they were valued ingredients of many medicines, perfumes, and love potions. Spices were also a status symbol. Liberally spiced foods served at banquets signaled a household's wealth. Nutmeg and mace were once popular fumigants against the plague, inspiring ornate silver pocket graters that are now collector's items.

Nutmeg and mace are most often used as a “sweet” spice, to add to cakes, cookies, custards, and other desserts, sometimes in combination with cinnamon and cloves. They play a role in savory dishes too. Many vegetables benefit from a pinch of nutmeg or mace, especially when the dish includes a cream sauce or an egg mixture like a quiche.

A sprinkling of mace adds a warm, aromatic zip to mulled wine and cider. My children enjoy it in hot chocolate and spicy muffins. Many winter dishes and holiday treats are enhanced with mace and nutmeg. You'll also find nutmeg and mace in many unexpected places: they flavor some commercial mouthwashes, toothpastes, chewing gum, soft drinks, liqueurs, tobacco, and

processed meat products.

Mace is usually ground fine into an orange-red powder, which is best stored in an airtight container in a dry, cool, dark cabinet. Nutmeg is best kept whole, stored similarly, and grated fresh for immediate use. One whole nutmeg yields two to three teaspoons of grated nutmeg.

There are several choices in nutmeg graters on the market; some incorporate a compartment in which to store the whole nutmegs. Many cooks prefer the old-fashioned small tin nutmeg graters. Rotary graters, made of wood or acrylic, are also available.

It is true that in large quantities, nutmeg—and mace to a lesser degree—are considered a narcotic and stimulant. Scientists have identified psychoactive elements in the spices. None of these factors should prove harmful, however, if nutmeg is used in moderation, as we tend to enjoy it in our fine cooking.

—E. Barrie Kavasch, the author of *Native Harvest, Recipes and Botanicals of the American Indian* (Vintage Books, 1979), is an ethnobotanist from Bridge-water, Connecticut. ♦



**Sponsoring an event that you want readers to know about? Send an announcement to Calendar, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Be sure to include dates, a complete address, and the phone number to call for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. We go to press three months before the issue date of the magazine and must be notified well in advance. The deadline for the June/July issue is March 1.**

## CALIFORNIA

Conference—The American Institute of Wine and Food Annual Conference, "Children's Education: Feeding Our Future," March 10–13. At the Doubletree at Fisherman's Wharf, Monterey. For information, call 415/255-3000.

Festival—Monterey Wine Festival, March 13–15. For information, call 408/656-9463.

Festival—Stockton Asparagus Festival, April 22–24. For information, contact Stockton-San Joaquin Convention & Visitors Bureau, 800/350-1987 or 209/466-6674.

## COLORADO

Festival—Taste of Vail Food & Wine Festival, April 8–9. For information, call 303/479-1394.

Classes—Indian Vegetarian Cooking in the Gujarati Style. Contact Jessica Shah, 971 Clover Circle, Lafayette, CO 80026; 303/665-2000.

## FLORIDA

Festival and auction—Florida Winefest & Auction, April 21–23. Resort at Long Boat Key Club, Sarasota. For information, call 813/922-6211.

## MARYLAND

Classes—Baltimore International Culinary College, 206 Water St., Baltimore, MD 21202. Mini-courses offered Monday through Thursday. For information, call 410/752-4983.

## MASSACHUSETTS

Show—The 27th Annual International Boston Seafood Show, March 15–17. Hynes Convention Center, Boston. For information, call 207/774-0076.

## NEW YORK

Classes—New School Culinary Arts, 100 Greenwich Ave., New York, NY 10011. Courses in cooking, baking, wine appreciation, and career training. Spring semester runs from February 1 through May. For information, call 212/255-4141.

Classes—Peter Kump's School of Culinary Arts, 307 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128. Year-round classes, demonstrations, and weekend workshops on French cooking techniques, pastry and baking, spa cooking, regional cuisines, and business. For information, call 800/522-4610.

Classes—Study the art of sushi. To join a class, or for information on forming your own group, contact Kenji at Takada Maki Inc., 50 Lexington Ave., Suite 178, New York, NY 10010; 800/669-0860.

Dinners, workshops, and wine-tastings—Events held throughout the year at The James Beard Foundation, 167 West 12th St., New York, NY 10011. On March 20, Chef Faz Poursohi of San Francisco prepares a dinner to celebrate the Persian New Year. For information, call 212/675-4984.

Workshop and demonstrations—Hot'n'Spicy Weekend: A Caribbean Adventure, March 11–13. Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz. For information, call 800/772-6646.

## NEW MEXICO

Show—The 6th Annual National Fiery Foods Show, February 19–20. Albuquerque Convention Center. For information, write to PO Box 4980, Albuquerque, NM 87196.

## PENNSYLVANIA

Festival—The Book and the Cook, March 16–27. Cookbook authors team up with Philadelphia chefs to design special meals. For information, contact the Philadelphia Visitors Center, 800/537-7676 or 215/636-1666.

## TEXAS

Festival—Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Festival, April 8–10, Four Seasons Hotel, Austin. For information, call 512/329-0770.

## VERMONT

Workshop—Experience the Taste of Italy, March 18–20. The Inn at Essex. For information, contact New England Culinary Institute, 802/878-1100.

## WEST VIRGINIA

Classes—Five-day cooking school sessions at La Varenne at The Greenbrier begin February 20 and run through April 29. For information, contact La Varenne, The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986; 800/624-6070.

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SOURCE: Covington Ranch QA data from USDA approved Green Meadows Laboratory, Ft. Collins, CO and USDA Handbooks 8-5, 8-13, 8-17.

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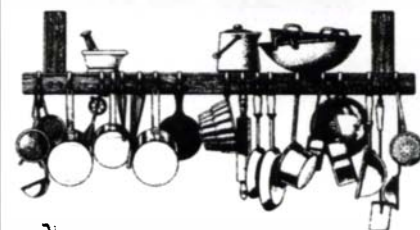
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# Vegetables with an International Flavor



Fresh vegetables can be really good when simply steamed and topped with a knob of butter and a twist of salt and pepper. But sometimes we want to do more to our garden produce to keep things interesting. When looking for new ways to prepare, season, and cook vegetables, a look at the cuisines of other nations can yield inspiration.

The following books offer fresh treatments for vegetables to serve any place in the meal, from appetizers to desserts. In each of the books, the author's enthusiasm for the topic is clear—evinced by the range of appealing recipes and the quality of the “extra” information, such as glossaries and informative introductory notes. The books are all different in style, but each author tells eloquently how she values vegetables on their own merits, not just as adjuncts to the “main dish.”

***Verdura—Vegetables Italian Style***, by Viana La Place. WILLIAM MORROW & CO., INC., 1991. \$22.95, HARDCOVER; 388 PP. ISBN 0-688-08764-7.

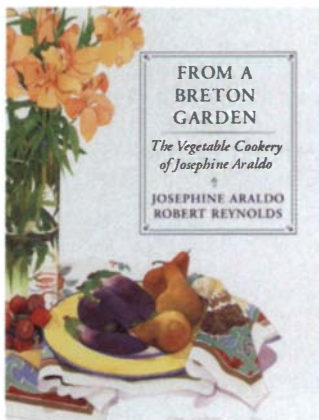
Italy is the country to which many cooks turn first for delicious vegetable dishes. *Verdura* is a collection of Italian-inspired recipes with an earthy but stylish book jacket that accurately signals the tenor of the recipes that follow.

A few of the nearly 300 recipes may be more evocative than usable—the

headnotes to Radicchio, Hard-Cooked Eggs, and Bread conjure up an idyllic summer afternoon among friends, but the recipe is nothing more than the title ingredients plus a shake of salt. In the main, however, La Place's book is brimming with delicious and different recipes for antipasti, salads, bruschette, soups, stews, pizzas, pasta, risotti, main dishes, and more, such as Green Beans in Coral-Colored Sauce, Fried Yellow Peppers with Mint, and Potato-Tomato Soup with Rosemary.

The recipes are typically Italian in their constitution: just a handful of ingredients combined by straightforward cooking methods, resulting in lots of bright, gutsy flavors and textures. While the methods themselves are straightforward, La Place's instructions sometimes assume more cooking knowledge than a novice cook might have. For example, she instructs us to “cook the mustard greens” without indicating for how long or until what consistency.

The book includes a thirty-page guide to vegetables and herbs containing instructions for choosing and handling, plus an eight-page general ingredient glossary. A “pantry recipes” section gives recipes for condiments that would be great to have on hand for use in everyday cooking: Perfumed Black Olives, Lemon Mayonnaise, and Olive Oil from Hell. There are no photographs.



***From a Breton Garden***, by Josephine Araldo and Robert Reynolds. ARIS BOOKS, 1990. \$22.95, HARDCOVER, 353 PP. ISBN 0-201-51759-0.

This book presents a lot more than just vegetable recipes. It includes solid cooking wisdom and techniques, wine suggestions for each dish, and fascinating reminiscences of the life of co-author Josephine Araldo. Araldo was a French chef whose culinary skills and philosophy were shaped by her upbringing in Brittany, her professional training at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris in the early 1920s, and her career as a private chef and cooking teacher in San Francisco.

The recipe collection is a merger of earthy provincial and classic cooking. Some readers may find the fare a little stodgy for everyday eating—bacon, butter, and cream sauces are integral to many of the French classics included. But the range of recipes is broad, and in addition to the classics are dishes that are fresh and contemporary in feeling, even though many were from Araldo's Breton grandmother. Spinach with Greengage Plums, Celery Root Soup with Chervil Butter, and Carrots with Cider are examples of the more original recipes. And of course there are plenty of recipes for artichokes, the quintessential Breton vegetable. The book has some pretty black-and-white illustrations; no photographs.



***Jane Grigson's Vegetable Book***. PENGUIN BOOKS, 1979. \$29.95, SOFTCOVER; 616 PP. ISBN 0-14-046859-5.

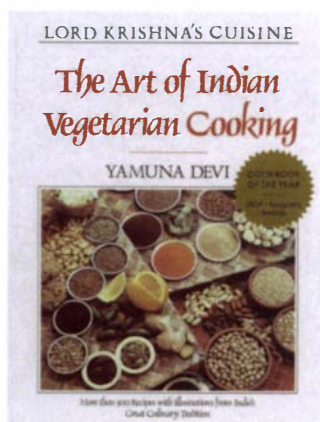
It may seem counter to popular wisdom to look to England for good veg-



etable recipes, given the poor reputation of English cuisine (perpetuated perhaps by the English fondness for a dish called "mushy peas"). Any hesitations about English culinary expertise will turn to enthusiasm after reading a few pages of Jane Grigson's book. This book is a masterpiece, as are all her books, full of sound information on a wide range on vegetables, and including hundreds of delicious recipes from England and around the world.

The choicest aspect of the book may be Grigson's writing, which is scholarly, warm, funny, and eminently readable. Each vegetable has its own chapter, and in addition to good information on choosing and preparing, the chapters include Grigson's personal observations and fascinating anecdotes about the vegetables. The book is highly informative about food and cooking. There are no photographs.

(The U.S. edition is out of print, but the English edition may be ordered by mail from Kitchen Arts and Letters, 212/876-5550, or through some second-hand book dealers.)



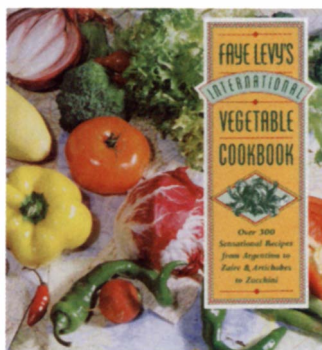
**Lord Krishna's Cuisine, The Art of Indian Vegetarian Cooking**, by Yamuna Devi. BALA BOOKS, INC., 1987. \$30, HARDCOVER; 799 PP. ISBN 0-525-24564-2. (THE BEST OF LORD KRISHNA'S CUISINE, AN ABRIDGED VERSION, IS ALSO AVAILABLE. PLUME, 1991. \$12.95, SOFTCOVER; 242 PP. ISBN 0-452-26683-1.)

Winner of the 1987 IACP/Seagram Book of the Year Award, *The Art of Indian Vegetarian Cooking* is not just about

vegetables. The recipes span the full range of vegetarian dishes, but the section on vegetable-based dishes (as opposed to dairy- or grained-based ones) is very strong, containing over a hundred recipes for main- and side-dish vegetables. This book also includes many more recipes for vegetable chutneys, salads, fritters, even a few desserts. The chunky book contains loads of useful and interesting information on ingredients and cooking methods (but no photographs). Most of this technical talk is found in a seventy-page section called "A-Z General Information," but each recipe also begins with a headnote offering precise cultural and practical information.

Recipes such as Garden Vegetable Stew with Almond Pesto and Fried Dumplings, Buttery Sweet Potato Purée with Tomato Bits, and Lima Beans with Golden Raisins are just a few examples of the many appealing dishes that would be perfectly appropriate to serve in both Indian- and Western-style meals.

There is a "greatest hits" version of this book, with only 242 pages (*The Best of Lord Krishna's Cuisine*), but if you have space on your shelf, it's worth getting the original volume for the wealth of recipes and techniques, as well as for the inspirational voice of the author, whose respect for food and devotion to cooking shines from each page.



**Faye Levy's International Vegetable Cookbook**. WARNER BOOKS, INC., 1993. \$29.95, HARDCOVER; 453 PP. ISBN 0-446-51719-4.

For a whirlwind, round-the-world tour of vegetable recipes, turn to this book. Faye Levy has gathered recipes

Also look for these books on general vegetable cooking:

**Fields of Greens**, by Annie Somerville. Bantam Books, 1993. \$26.95, hardcover; 437pp. ISBN 0-553-09139-5.

**Greene on Greens**, by Bert Greene. Workman Publishing, 1984. \$15.95, softcover; 432 pp. ISBN 0-89480-659-9.

**Uncommon Fruits & Vegetables, A Commonsense Guide**, by Elizabeth Schneider. Harper & Row, 1986. \$20, softcover; 546 pp. ISBN 0-06-091669-9.

**The Victory Garden Cookbook**, by Marian Morash. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982. \$29.95, softcover; 374 pp. ISBN 0-394-70780-X.

from diverse countries whose cuisines are not well-known to American cooks. Kale with Egyptian Garlic Sauce, Colombian Lentil Soup, and Korean Carrots and Zucchini are a few examples of Levy's international recipes, adapted for American ingredients and methods of work. Levy also includes recipes from more familiar turf like France, Italy, and the United States.

The book is organized into chapters on individual vegetables or vegetable families—"Brussels Sprouts"; "Mushrooms"; "Zucchini, Summer Squash, and Chayote." Each chapter starts with a general discussion of the vegetable followed by a "basics" page, outlining its season, how to choose and store, serving size, nutrition, and basic preparation methods.

There are also chapters on vegetable combinations, sauces and dressings, and basic recipes. The book contains eight pages of color photographs.

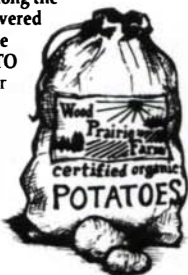
—Martha Holmberg ♦

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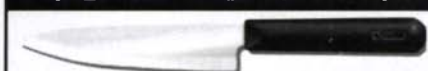
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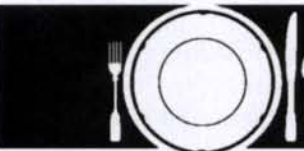
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# The School of Hard Nockerls

The three of us settled into our seats and watched the Munich train station recede as the engine picked up speed. It was the summer of 1965, and we were headed for Salzburg, Austria. We thought it was a good idea to do a little research before arriving in a new city, so I browsed through the travel guide, *Europe on Ten Dollars a Day*. Along with my companions, Bob Paulson and John Warnlof, I was drowsy from a lunch of bratwursts, hot mustard, and thick German beer. The rhythm of the train soon put us all to sleep. But before dozing off, I read in my trusty guide, "When in Salzburg, be sure to have the *Salzburger Nockerl*."

Sampling the local fare had become an important part of our travel experience. Raised on the West Coast and still in college, we were eager to learn about European food. We learned that potato salad didn't require mayonnaise, that *Wienerschnitzel* had nothing to do with wieners, and that coffee was actually a delicious drink that should be made one cup at a time. So the nockerl thing lodged somewhere in my brain as I shut off the lights.

**Mozart's town**—Salzburg is quaint with a capital Q. A river runs through the city, a castle overlooks it, and its Tyrolean buildings intertwine their roofs, porches, and awnings in offhanded perfection. Our hotel was right in the middle of it—around the corner from Mozart's house, we were told.

My two years of high-school German were enough to designate me as the interpreter when in Germanic countries. I stepped up to the hotel desk and filled out the forms while my mates waited out in the hall. When I emerged from the lobby, I found them in smooth conversation with three coeds from USC. They had just arrived, and my friends had invited them to dinner.

The restaurant was just down the



street from the hotel. Its facade was a row of twenty-foot-tall gothic arches, which turned into groin-vault ceilings over the cavernous dining room. Groin-vault acoustics are entertaining because they reflect sound from unexpected places. With surprising clarity, we could listen in on conversations at distant tables. The six of us amused ourselves this way, eavesdropping on other tables while testing the local beers and comparing travel stories. I remained the only one with a rudimentary knowledge of German, so when our waiter arrived, I got the menu. As I scanned it, my eyes affixed upon the target: *Salzburger Nockerl*. It was a little expensive, but what the heck, we were in the celebration zone. Confident, I told our waiter that we would like six *Salzburger Nockerls*, and another round of beer.

The waiter's eyes widened a bit, as if seeking confirmation of some sort. Then he turned and headed off to the kitchen. His expression was the little warning bell we sometimes learn to recognize and heed later in life. At the time, it just went right by.

In the back, the help periodically poked their heads out of the kitchen and looked our way. I figured it must be the acoustics. Our table was abuzz with conversation, with plenty of savvy world-traveller stories flying about. Our stomachs were ready for some solid food, and

our talk turned to delicious anticipation of the feast to come.

Then they came. Our waiter arrived with a stainless-steel tray the size of a mail cart. On its two wide shelves squatted what looked like six glossy basketballs. Each basketball was centered in a large silver tray, glued there by a viscous liquid. Silence. Silence among us. Silence in the groin vaults.

Our waiter left us there, each peering over our own personal globe. As our culinary leader, I took the first bite. It was a wet, spongy, cloying, headachy-sweet thing. And it didn't go with beer.

Hah hah. How about those nockerls. It didn't work. Snickers sprinkled down from the groin vaults. Our new friends pecked at their orange spheres and started talking about what a long day it had been.

When the three of us got back to our hotel room, I dug around for the travel guide and looked up Salzburg. I wanted to find the fateful sentence and see if I'd missed something. Indeed I had. It read, "When in Salzburg, be sure to have the *Salzburger Nockerl*—a sweet soufflé dessert for six to eight people."

—Charles Miller, Newtown, CT ♦

We buy stories about culinary adventures. Send them to Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.



*Creamy Cherry Cheese Pie  
in just 15 minutes...  
It's as easy as Eagle® Brand*

*Eagle® Brand Cherry Cheese Pie*

*(Prep Time: 15 Minutes)*

*Count on Eagle Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk for cherry cheese pie that's simply irresistible.  
Because Eagle Brand classic desserts are always quick, easy and absolutely delicious.*



- 1 (9-in.) graham cracker crumb crust or baked pastry shell
- 1 (8-oz.) package cream cheese, softened
- 1 (14-oz.) can Eagle® Brand Sweetened Condensed Milk (NOT evaporated milk)
- 1/3 cup RealLemon® Lemon Juice from Concentrate
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 (21-oz.) can cherry pie filling, chilled

In large mixer bowl, beat cheese until fluffy. Gradually beat in Eagle Brand until smooth. Stir in RealLemon® brand and vanilla. Pour into prepared crust. Chill 3 hours or until set. Top with cherry pie filling before serving. Refrigerate leftovers. (Makes one 9-inch pie.)

*Another classic Eagle® Brand dessert*





# Kitchen Fires



Vulcan,  
gas, 1874



Royal Herald,  
coal or wood, 1909



New Perfection,  
kerosene, 1911



Barstow Insulated,  
gas, 1925



Kenmore,  
kerosene, 1911



Hotel Household "160," wood, 1920



Wyncroft,  
gas, 1909

A selection of stoves, from the  
Culinary Archives & Museum,  
Johnson & Wales University,  
Providence, Rhode Island.